

CHRISTIAN COURIER

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Liberal government launches marriage revolution



Harry der Nederlanden

Irwin Cotler, Canada's Justice Minister, tabled the Civil Marriages Act on Feb. 1, the second day of this session of parliament. It removes from the definition of marriage the condition that it must be between a man and a woman and launches Canada on what Bruce Clemenger of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) called "a radical social experiment" that has not been sufficiently thought through.

Both Cotler and P.M. Martin framed the occasion in terms of the onward march of human rights which may not be held back by religious prejudices. They called the legislation "a natural and necessary evolution of minority-rights protection under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." Cotler hailed the bill as a vindication of the Charter rights of "tolerance, respect and equality" of all Canadians and minorities, not only gays and lesbians.

"The Charter is the expression and entrenchment of our rights and freedoms, the codification of the best of Canadian values and aspirations. It defines us as to who we are as a people and what we aspire to be," said Cotler.



The preamble to the bill says, "In order to reflect values of tolerance, respect and equality consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, access to marriage for civil purposes should be extended by legislation to couples of the same sex."

"Canada cannot and will not pick and choose which rights they would defend and ignore. If fundamental rights of one minority can be denied, if one prohibited form of discrimination under the Charter can be waived away, so can potentially those of others."

The preamble notes that hundreds of Canadian same-sex couples have already been married in several provinces. Part of the bill provides protection for religious groups, giving them the freedom to refuse to perform such marriages.

After it is debated in the House of Commons, the bill will be sent to committee. Cotler expects it to come up for a vote in June. If it passes, Canada will become only the third country in the world to permit same-sex marriage.

Call for referendum

Many evangelical leaders have called for a referendum on the issue, and even some Liberals would support such a move. But

the idea has been firmly rebuffed by Cotler and Martin. *The National Post* released the results of a survey showing that over two-thirds of Canadians would be in favor of such a national referendum.

The Campaign Life Coalition, which has organized an effective letter-writing campaign against the bill, does not favor a referendum. Aiden Reid of the Coalition said,

"We don't generally agree with referendums to deal with moral issues. Cotler asked the rhetorical question: Would you decide the right of women to vote by a referendum? Putting minority rights to a majority vote, many have suggested, is not a good idea.

The *National Post* poll also showed that 66 percent of Canadians favor keeping the traditional

definition of marriage, while strongly supporting the protection of the civil rights of homosexuals. In other words, they do not agree with provincial judges who have ruled that the traditional view of marriage is discriminatory.

Inadequate protection

But Conservative justice critic
See Marriage p. 2

ICS given permission to grant doctoral degree

The Institute for Christian Studies (ICS), a Christian graduate school in interdisciplinary philosophy based in Toronto, has become one of the first privately-funded independent academic institutions in Canada to be able to grant its own PhD.

The ICS was informed that it would receive authority to grant its own PhD and MA degrees in philosophy in late December.

"This is incredible news," said Dr. Harry Fernhout, President of ICS. "ICS has journeyed long and hard to get to this moment. ICS can now give degrees

See ICS p. 2



News

Comments made by Janet Epp Buckingham of the EFC

We have been given bland assertions by the Justice Minister that religious freedom will be protected with the redefinition of marriage but there is absolutely no evidence of this.

Already we have seen marriage commissioners forced to resign in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba over this issue. Mayors have been forced to resign in Newfoundland. A human rights complaint has been heard against the Knights of Columbus for refusing to rent their hall for a lesbian wedding reception.

This is just the beginning of the types of religious freedom violations we anticipate from the redefinition of the institution of marriage. With more than 75 percent of marriages in Canada solemnized by clergy, it is clearly a deeply religious institution. It is

naïve and impossible to say that you can change civil marriage without it having an impact on religious marriage and religious institutions. The Prime Minister has said that this is an issue of fundamental rights. He has said that in redefining marriage, he is defending the Charter. If that is the case, there is no room for those of us who have a different vision of family life in Canada. We are already being pushed to the margins of Canadian life. We are being made to feel unwelcome. This is not tolerance and it is not upholding the Charter.

The assurances the Justice Minister is making are empty promises. The Supreme Court of Canada said that any protection for religious freedom in this legislation will be struck down by the courts because the federal government does not

have the legislative power to make such a law. Under the Constitution Act, 1867, only the provincial governments can legislate to protect religious freedom relating to the solemnization of marriage. But we have not seen any action by provincial governments to protect religious freedom. Religious freedom is a political football that is being tossed back and forth between the federal and provincial governments. Churches and religious institutions are being set up for endless court cases. It will be death by a thousand cuts.

We call on the Justice Minister to tell Canadians how he will ensure that religious freedom is protected before he proceeds to force the redefinition of marriage on all Canadians.

Janet Epp Buckingham – Director, Law and Public Policy

gious leaders know very well they won't be forced to perform same-sex marriages, but they are lying about it to stir up their constituencies. (Both Toews and Buckingham allude to officials in two provinces who have already been fired for refusing, but these are not clergy, these are public officials.)

Not a human rights issue

Vancouver Archbishop Raymond Roussin insisted: "This is not a human rights issue; it is about recognizing the biological basis for the social structure that protects the procreation and nurturing of children in our society."

Roussin said that all people ought to be treated with dignity and respect as Jesus taught us, but he added: "Jesus did not teach that any behavior is acceptable as long as someone wants it. The authen-

tic Jesus called for moral conversion, and repentance."

In an open letter Cardinal Marc Ouellet, archbishop of Quebec and primate of Canada, warned: "We now find ourselves before a critical threshold in the evolution of society and culture, and we must reflect very seriously before crossing it."

Extending the status of marriage to same-sex couples, he said, is a change that "affects the most fundamental institution and the primary value of society: marriage and family, which have existed throughout human history and predate the state and the law themselves."

Changing marriage in this way "would alter the institution of marriage by ignoring two of its essential finalities: the procreation and education of children, within the context of the love of a man and a woman, guarantee the future of society."

Ouellet also pointed out that the bill "is offensive to the moral and religious sensibility of a great number of citizens, both Catholic and non-Catholic. In fact, many Christians and adherents of other religious traditions find the union of persons of the same sex to be morally unacceptable, even as they refrain from judging those persons themselves."

...Marriage cont.

Vic Toews objected that the bill fails to provide adequate protection for religious officials who do not wish to marry gays and lesbians.

Toews promised that the Conservatives would propose amendments to reinforce the bill's protection for those who oppose gay marriage. However, he suggested that they might not do much good in the event of a court challenge, because "whenever equality rights and religious rights collide [in the courts], equality rights trump."

He said: "We have seen over the last number of years a consistent pattern of court decisions and human rights decisions that, when religious rights come up against equality rights, the equality rights will trump religious freedoms, so there are genuine concerns among the faith communities that this bill will do nothing to protect religious organizations and to stop what has been happening in the erosion of religious freedom in this country."

Janet Buckingham of the EFC also suggested that since marriage falls in the jurisdiction of the provinces, the federal government may not be able to guarantee such protection for religious officials who perform marriages. But John Ibbitson, writing in the *Globe and Mail*, blasts this as scaremongering. He charges that reli-



Vandezande gets award



Gerald Vandezande, retired founder and longtime leader of Citizens for Public Justice, was awarded the Kroeger College Award for Ethics in Public Affairs at Carleton University on Feb. 9. The award is given to an individual or organization that has been an inspiring example of the importance of ethics and values in public life. Last year's recipient was Romeo Dallaire.

Dr. Eileen Saunders, Director of Carleton's Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs, said that the awards "are meant to showcase to all Canadian's individual and collective effort in pursuit of the public good."

Gerald has certainly done that and more, serving with unflagging zeal as the Public Affairs Director of CPJ for 35 years. We, of course, see much more in Gerald's 35 years of work for public justice. We see in him the embodiment of the Reformed or neo-Kuyperian worldview that God says Yes to all he has made and a confirmation of the Bible's promise that the Creator and Redeemer of all things will continue to raise up prophets among us.

ICS cont. from p. 1

that are appropriate to our programs, and that are the same as those granted by other universities and graduate schools. We are grateful for the work of so many, and the prayers of even more people that have brought us to where we are today."

Previously, the ICS was allowed to conduct a program that led to the granting of a doctoral degree by the Free University of Amsterdam and grant a master's degree in Philosophical Foundations.

In 2000, the Ontario Provincial Government decided to grant degree-granting authority to private academic institutions if they passed scrutiny.

After a year-long review by external peer review panels, ICS was adjudged to meet or exceed standards on all counts.

"ICS offers some truly impressive programs in Philosophy," remarked Dr. Robert Gibbs, Professor and Associate

Chair in the Department of Philosophy at U of T, and Chair of PEQAB's Quality Assessment Panel. "With a relatively small faculty, they offer a rich, diverse, rigorous and intensive education for students in philosophy and have achieved the formation of a community of learning that is outstanding."

"The Ministerial Consent lays a foundation on which we can build for years to come," comments Dr. Lambert Zuidervaart, a professor of philosophy at ICS. "It means that our academic peers officially recognize and endorse our graduate programs in inter-disciplinary philosophy. It allows new forms of cooperation with other universities in Ontario as well as the Free University in Amsterdam. And it creates new incentives and opportunities to fund our students, who bring so much commitment and talent to the ICS community."

Former private school principal charged

The Toronto Police Service has been investigating a series of alleged sexual assaults that occurred at the Willowdale Christian School, located at 60 Hilda Avenue, Toronto. These sexual assaults occurred between 1967 and 1969.

On Tuesday, January 25, 2005, Nicholas Vandooren, 63, of Waterdown, was arrested and charged with Indecent Assault, as a result of this investigation.

Vandooren was the principal and a teacher at the private school during the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the time of the alleged assaults, the female victim was a child.

Vandooren is scheduled to make a court appearance on Thursday, February 24, 2005, at 10 a.m.

Please pray for all parties involved and their families.

Anyone with information regarding these events is asked to call 32 Division Youth Bureau at 416-808-3205 or Crime Stoppers at 416-222-TIPS (8477). Constable Wendy Drummond, Corporate Communications, for Detective Constable Tom Rataj, 32 Division.

Politics

Truce creates glimmers of hope in Israel and Palestine

Harry der Nederlanden

Israelis and Palestinians are afraid to get their hopes up after four years of constant violence, but the summit between P.M. Ariel Sharon and the new Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has raised hopes around the world. There have, of course, been many such moments of promise over the last 50 years and they have repeatedly been dashed. Promises have been made and been broken by both sides, and both have been guilty of failing to negotiate in good faith.

The last intifada (uprising) has been more violent than the first, with over 1,000 Jews killed, many by suicide bombers, and three times that many Palestinians in acts of retaliation.

The one thing that lends hope to the present talks is that both sides seem to have hit rock bottom in a conflict that has been killing their children since before the UN granted Israel statehood in 1948. The last time hopes were raised was in 2000 after meetings at Camp David, but Arafat was either unable or unwilling to carry out the pledges made there.

Sharon and Abbas have agreed to a truce and committed themselves to talks. That is something to celebrate. This time, too, the

talks are not hosted by the US but by two Arab neighbors – Egypt and Jordan. Condoleezza Rice, the new US Secretary of State, did meet with Sharon and Abbas prior to the summit (as did Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pierre Pettigrew), but she did not participate. An American general has been appointed to help arrange security between the two parties.

Hamas, the most powerful Palestinian faction besides Fatah (Arafat's group), let it be known that Abbas is not authorized to sign a truce on their behalf. However, as long as Israel observes the peace, they said they would do likewise. In the past Hamas has refused to recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a nation and has dedicated itself to its destruction. This illustrates the difficulty Abbas (and Arafat before him) must overcome to represent the Palestinian people in any negotiations.

Over the span of its history, Israel has made it very difficult and at times impossible for a legitimate Palestinian leadership to emerge. Like Arafat, Abbas has to deal with several major factions among his people, each with its own "army." And relations among them has often been stormy, sometimes lethal.

Abbas' recent victory in a fair election and his recent ability to deploy hundreds of Palestinian troops in northern Gaza to forestall further attacks against Israel raise hopes that Palestine is at last developing a viable government.

In the past Israel has broken off talks whenever there was another Palestinian attack, which meant that any one of the numerous militant factions could literally put a bomb under peace efforts. This is what happened immediately after Abbas' election. Sharon rebuffed Abbas after an attack on Israeli settlements in Gaza. Sharon demanded that Abbas put a stop to such attacks.

If Abbas were to take forceful action against a powerful group like Hamas, however, Palestinians could become embroiled in a civil war. So Abbas has to negotiate not just with Israel but with the various factions among his own people.

Israel is running out of time and options, wrote Tony Judt in an article in the *New York Review of Books*



Sharon and Abbas

(Oct., 2003). Although it is a democratic country, it has within its borders an Arab population that it has reduced to second-class citizenship, to "dhimmi" status, one might say. One option for Israel is to give up the settlements and retreat to its 1967 borders so that it can remain a Jewish state with an Arab minority it discriminates against. Or it can seek to keep the occupied territories and settlements, but then Jews will soon be outnumbered. This means Israel will either have to suspend democracy or it will lose its Jewish identity. Judt suggests that many would resist such a retreat with their very lives, precipitating civil conflict among Israelis. Judt, therefore, sees very little hope in the two-state solution proposed by Oslo and promoted by the so-called "road map."

So, yes, there is hope – if Israel is willing to become a multicultural state. But here is also deep pessimism, for many Jews have given their lives to create and defend a specifically Jewish state.

Israel has often been accused

of ethnic cleansing already. But its withdrawal from Gaza and recent court action forbidding the seizure of Arab property fenced in by the Wall indicates that the Israeli conscience cannot countenance further atrocities against the Palestinian people, no matter how deep the mutual hatred.

Commentators tend to agree that any permanent peace will require the dismantling of most if not all of the settlements erected in Palestinian territory after the 1967 war. That is unthinkable for a large contingent of Israelis (Israel, too, has its factions.) Judt suggests that many would resist such a retreat with their very lives, precipitating civil conflict among Israelis. Judt, therefore, sees very little hope in the two-state solution proposed by Oslo and promoted by the so-called "road map."

So, yes, there is hope – if Israel is willing to become a multicultural state. But here is also deep pessimism, for many Jews have given their lives to create and defend a specifically Jewish state.

Darfur no genocide but people still dying



Harry der Nederlanden

A UN commission concluded at the end of January that the mass killings and evictions of Darfurians from their villages in western Sudan do not amount to genocide.

It said that the "crucial element of genocidal intent" was not there on the part of the Sudan government. In other words, unintentional genocide isn't genocide. Although the Sudan

government as a whole has been exonerated, the commission did say that some individuals may be guilty of genocidal intent.

The attacks on hundreds of Darfurian villages by the government and the janjaweed militias was not intended to annihilate them but to suppress an insurgency, said the report. But it stressed that government forces and the janjaweed were guilty of "grave crimes."

Regardless of disagreements about what to label the atrocities happening in Sudan, according to news reports issued about the same time as the UN report, the raids and the killings continue. An observer from the African Union reported that he found seven more villages in southern Darfur burned to the ground and another three abandoned. About 9,000 more people were turned into refugees and over 100 killed. Aid workers claimed government planes were involved.

There were also reports of food aid being looted, and the high level of insecurity has seriously hampered aid to refugees in some areas so that people are starving.

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, suggested that perhaps sanctions ought to be applied. He also called for the deployment of more peacekeepers and a long-term program to help resettle over a million refugees in the south, where a peace deal has been negotiated.



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Editorial

Danger: religious motives at work

Harry der Nederlanden

As the Preacher observes again and again in *Ecclesiastes*, the world is an ever-changing, unruly place bursting with contradictions. Our political leaders praise multiculturalism and encourage Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus to cultivate their various traditions in this land, but then when push comes to shove our Minister of Foreign Affairs tells the churches to butt out of the marriage debate. At Paul Martin's installation as Prime Minister, a first nations shaman performed a little purification ceremony involving smoke and feathers. That was wonderful, of course. But imagine the outcry if Martin, a Catholic, had been anointed by a Catholic archbishop.

In an era where technology is said to be threatening to overwhelm the human, reducing our spirituality and our values to those of the shallow consumer, wise men and women everywhere are seeking ways to reanimate the public sphere with human passion. But when the people begin to bring their religious passions into politics, the experts recoil, crying, "Danger! Intolerance! Fanaticism!"

They can't seem to make up their minds: Is it good to bring your deepest beliefs to whatever you're doing, including politics, or is it to fall into the original sin of superstition, intolerance and domination?

When Pettigrew was inundated with letters protesting his blunt warning to churches to butt out, he explained that his critics failed to distinguish between civil and religious marriage.

"What I have said is that I believe that the separation of church and state is a wonderful invention of modernity. It allows us to have a civil marriage. When we are talking about civil marriage I would like everyone to talk about civil marriage and be careful to specify in their interventions that we are talking about civil marriage, not the religious one. The churches will keep their right – it is the Charter of Rights – to do religious marriage as they think is fit."

Often the marriage wars remind me of the endless

debate between the "ancients and the moderns," between those who hold up marriage and other institutions as timeless ideas (the ancients) and those who see nothing more than ever changing, fluid historical creations varying from era to era and culture to culture (the moderns). One can sift through history and find all sorts of different ways peoples have celebrated and structured marriages and families. Is arranging a union between the son and daughter of two powerful families or two dynasties to consolidate the power of those families the same thing as a union of a young man and a young woman who have "fallen in love" with one another? Clearly not, the modernist says (and anyone aware of the historical origins of things is a modernist nowadays). But how then are you still able to compare them as different embodiments of this one thing called marriage, ask those who hold to some idea of natural law or universals (what Russel Kirk calls "the permanent things").

So, you see, studying philosophy is not a complete waste of time, it may not be as useful as stitching people back together, hammering nails or laying bricks, but it helps us to understand something about vital arguments in the public arena about how people and societies are held together. For some things, ideas are better fasteners than nails or mortar or stitching. Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til, Hendrick Hart and Nicholas Woltersstorff, to mention only a few thinkers in the neo-Kuyperian tradition, have dedicated years of their lives to thinking about the relationship between marriage as a permanent, cross-cultural reality and all those different historical forms of it. I'm not recommending that you try to read their books – that would help neither your marriage nor your digestive system. But you might try Al Wolters short book, *Creation Regained*.

Even among those who have a good conception of marriage – Bible-believing evangelicals – marriage has not fared well. The divorce rate is the same as for others.

Pettigrew was wrong in telling the church to butt out, but he was right in saying that we are frequently talking about very different things. Some of us are thinking about that precious bond, at once sacred and personal, that joins two people in a way that grows deeper over the years. Others are thinking about that construct of laws dealing basically with the scaffolding – with taxes, property rights, divorce, wills, etc. – the shell rather than the living core. But, as the song puts it, "Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. Complications, brother: you can't have one without the o-o-other." The ideal thing has to find a humble home.

The debates around democracy and Iraq, or more generally, about Islam and democracy, circle around the same sort of polarities. Democracy, many insist, is not a political mechanism – the technology of political parties and voting procedures – that can be exported from the West to other cultures as if it were a trans-cultural thing. It is deeply rooted in long traditions, in culturally specific values and attitudes, in a well-developed civil society with many non-governmental associations – all of which have been nurtured by different streams (Greek, Hebrew, Christian, Common Law, Reformation, Enlightenment, etc.), so it is impossible to simply impose it on Arabic or Islamic culture. Without those indigenous roots, without the proper soil, it will inevitably mutate into something different.

Marriage, family, democracy, even the church – all of

these can be reduced to technology, instruments created by us humans to fashion our life together according to our own druthers without impunity. At the same time that this view of human institutions is becoming the current dogma, however, the awareness is also growing that we cannot follow this path of imposing our arbitrary will without serious repercussions. Liberals tend to see this especially with regard to our natural environment. Conservatives see it more clearly with regard to our moral and social environment. Today, liberal or conservative, we jump from one foot to the other: one moment everything is infinitely malleable clay to be shaped however we please (including our own sexuality); another moment nature is finite, limited, fragile, so we must err on the side of caution (precautionary principle).

So we live in a schizoid culture, of two minds regarding fundamental motives. We not only have a bad conscience, we fluctuate between the self-loathing of Noam Chomsky and the self-overestimation of the American/Canadian Idol contestants.

In his book *Collapse*, Jared Diamond describes the civilization of Easter Island. It collapsed about 300 years ago, he suggests, because the inhabitants became so obsessed with the religious duty of erecting those huge stone idols to their gods that they stripped the island of all its trees. Moving and erecting those colossal statues required a lot of wood. Along with deforestation came soil erosion and eventually starvation. In the end they were reduced to cannibalism. A tale with a moral for our time? Perhaps he is just a secularist trying to scare us about the destructive, self-blinding power of religion?

But recall Martin Luther. When he entered the Church, he saw it as the channel by which God's justice and grace, love and peace, blessing and salvation are infused into the human heart, human society and government. All through the Middle Ages, the Church was seen as the sluice gate through which pour the waters that nurture all aspects of human life. But a few years after posting his 95 theses, Luther called the Pope the Antichrist and saw the whole institution as a dispenser of poisoned waters that killed the soul and smothered natural life. Luther, in effect, saw Catholicism in much the same way that Diamond describes the religion of the Easter Islanders – as impelled toward death and destruction.

But the Bible never celebrates religion as such. It has always provided a warning against its power to blind and to kill. It warns against thinking we can ourselves erect permanent bastions against time and death. We are told not to trust in chariots and horses. But to trust in human institutions themselves, be it romantic marriage, liberal democracy, the welfare state, science, the free market, Reformed church order or a Kuyperian worldview, is no less harmful.

Any and all of these can become ends in themselves, our instruments for saving ourselves. When they stop serving as vehicles to connect us to God's grace, love and justice, they become death traps. They no longer convey blessing but rob us of joy, vitality and all the virtues that build strong community.

But when they are animated by faith, these same structures can serve to turn us each day anew to him who is the Source of all good. Then that religious passion is transformed by the cross, tempered by self-denial, conversion and renewal, and thus freed from its drive to enslave and dominate.

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Letters

The State and Gay Marriage

By the time you read this the minister of Justice, Irwin Cotler, has probably already introduced a bill dealing with gay marriages. Many have written against the proposal, especially from a religious perspective. What has been absent in much of the debate since some judges decided, like Humpty Dumpty, that marriage should not mean what it used to mean over the millennia is the question to what extent the state should be involved in marriage in the first place.

Looking at wedding rites and marriage from a historical perspective should give us some insight into this issue. The earliest written records are silent about wedding rites, although they do mention state involvement in marriage.

The Bible gives us a few clues about this early period. For instance, the Old Testament stories of the weddings of Isaac and Rebekah and of Jacob and his wives indicate that marriage was a private affair, akin to what we call common law marriage. More than 1500 years later that still seems to be an acceptable model as indicated in the apocryphal story of Tobias. The New Testament story of Jesus attending a wedding at Cana suggests that it was a large social affair. Whether this was the norm, however, is questionable.

In both testaments there is no indication whatever that the wedding involved religious rites or that the state was involved.

A different model existed in the Roman empire. Since the wife moved into the household of the husband, she also had to change house gods, and this involved religious rites during the wedding. Early Christianity thus had two

options; yet there is no indication that it accepted the Roman model.

It was only gradually that the church began to exert some influence on the wedding, replacing pagan worship rites with liturgical Christian rites. Still, it was not until the high Middle Ages that the church made marriage a sacrament and required that couples receive the church's blessing. Even then not everyone adhered to this new idea, as pronouncements of various councils indicate.

Rejecting the Catholic doctrine that marriage was a sacrament, the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century had two options: return the wedding to a private/social affair or involve the church. When the German reformer Martin Luther married in 1525, he married in the church (to please his relatives) but regarded marriage a social affair. John Calvin adhered much closer to the Catholic ecclesiastical model. The Netherlands, often regarded as a Calvinist country, was the first country in the West that allowed an ecclesiastical as well as a secular wedding. It was tolerance of other denominations that necessitated these two options.

In contrast, the French Revolution, strongly anti-clerical, made the wedding completely a secular affair. The state's involvement came at a time when there was an increase in state centralization, as can be seen for instance in the Napoleonic codes.

As a colony Canada followed the Anglican model, which regarded the church wedding as the key ceremony, a model enacted in 1753 in the so-called Hardwicke's Marriage Act. It was not until 1835 that civil marriage was made

optional. The influence of the 1753 act can still be observed in Canada: even many unchurched couples want to get married in church.

From this brief historical survey we can draw some conclusions. For millennia common law marriage was the norm, either as a private or as a public affair. The church has been involved in the wedding rites for less than a thousand years; the state for barely two centuries. This does not mean that the church or the state can't or shouldn't be involved, but they don't have to.

For Christians there are good theological reasons why they want the church to be involved. But do couples have good reasons why the state should be involved? Note here also that presently we make a distinction between common law marriage and marriage, although historically there is none.

The question may therefore be raised if a similar distinction should not be applied to gays and lesbians living together. Involvement in marriage rites is not the same as involvement in marriage. That religion is heavily involved in marriage becomes clear in, among others, baptisms, circumcisions, and initiations. For Jews and Christians marriage is a God-sanctioned institution.

The state's interest in marriage also has a long history. The earliest written records dealing with state involvement are laws about 4000 years old. The ancient Babylonian codes of Lipit Ishtar and Hammurabi indicate their interest in the issue of divorce: how to divide the property. Two thousand years later, at the time of Jesus' birth, the Roman emperor Augustus took a census in order to determine the number of people in his empire who could pay taxes, then or potentially later, and who could possibly be soldier, then or potentially later.

Today the government wants to ensure that parents do not abuse their children,

and a whole array of other issues could be marshalled. But does this state involvement justify the state's involvement in the bedroom? Prime-Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau suggested decades ago that the state had no business in the bedroom. So why should the state be involved in gay marriages? Isn't that involvement in the bedrooms of the nation? Assuming that the state can and should be involved in some aspects of married life does not imply that the state should be involved in areas it has no business to be involved in.

The Supreme Court has stated that the government could introduce laws changing the meaning of the word marriage, but it did not bother to deal with the issue whether or not the state should be involved in marriage in the first place. Changing the meaning of the term is an act of centralization and do we want more centralization? Those who agree with the change as well as those who oppose it have totally ignored this aspect. The minister of justice has not really justified this troubling issue; he has only assumed it as an accepted fact.

It's a fact that gays and lesbians live together, and as far as I'm concerned (even though I disapprove of their life style) they should not experience discrimination. It was the notion of discrimination that brought about the change of the term "marriage." In order to avoid legal discrimination some groups have advocated calling the living together of gays and lesbians "civil unions." That's no more discriminatory than the term "common law marriage." While at times centralization is necessary, the government has not made its case in this particular issue. In my opinion, let us have not more government involvement where that is unnecessary.

Yours truly,
Bert den Boggende,
Brooks, AB

Return healthcare to its original goals

The decision by an Ontario court – that the public health care system is not obliged to provide specialized care for autistic children past age six – highlights one of the most important reasons why health care must not be co-opted by the public sector: medical decisions wind up being made by judges for economic reasons, rather than by doctors for medical reasons.

Canada's socialists have a long history of bleating that "Only the public sector should be allowed to provide health care." But every time they warn about the dangers of "for-profit" health care, we should remember that they have a profit motive, too: their own. The public sector unions, the health-care unions, and the labor movement generally want hegemony over health care, but not for altruistic motives. They're guarding their turf.

Two other important areas share the same bias, and for the same reasons: child care and education. These are fiefdoms staked out by the public sector so they can build empires and careers, and compel the taxpayer to foot the bill. Anti-poverty groups want to keep welfare in the public sector for similar reasons: political and economic self-interest.

But as *Calgary Herald* reporter Joe Woodard said a couple of years ago, these are three

fields of public service in which money alone cannot motivate the proper human care of human beings: Health, Education and Welfare. To serve in these fields, the motivation must be love. And there's just one great inexhaustible Source of love in the universe.

As the Bible says, the laborer is worthy of his hire – people who serve others by working in these three fields should be adequately paid. That's why the Christian Labour Association of Canada is gaining prominence in the health-care field: they negotiate on behalf of workers from a position that recognizes the service orientation of the field. They work to persuade management to pay decent wages, but they don't hold patients hostage.

It's important that Canada's health-care system, so desperately in need of an overhaul, be returned to its original concept: a universal insurance system to fund the private doctor/patient relationship against catastrophic expenses.

It can be done. But it will not be done by caving in to doctrinaire socialists who want to put commissioners and union bosses in charge of every public need.

Ron Gray

Ron Gray is the national leader of the Christian Heritage Party of Canada. This was his CHP Communiqué for Jan. 18, 2005.

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Opinion

Iraq, McDonald's, and the Fruit of the Spirit

John Bolt

January 30, 2005. Mark the date on your calendars and add it to the list of memorable moments in the laborious march of human liberty. Put it next to 1215 (Magna Carta), April 1, 1572 (Brielf), July 4, 1776, January 1, 1863 (Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation), June 6, 1944 (D-day), June 5, 1989 (Tiananmen Square), and November 9, 1989 (Fall of Berlin Wall). On January 30, 2005 Iraqi voters defied the brutal enemies of freedom within, confounded the cynical nay-sayers without and courageously went to the polls in massive numbers to cast their ballots. This is the third major election (after Afghanistan and the Ukraine) in the last half year in which liberty made significant progress.

The North American media did take note, even grudgingly expressed admiration, but immediately muted their celebration with guarded comments about the future still being uncertain, risky and dangerous. They couldn't deny what they and we had seen, but they were not about to grant President Bush any credit for his persistent refusal to postpone the process toward democratic self-government for Iraq. As I pondered this, wondering why, I made an unexpected connection with the sermon I had heard that same day.

On January 30, 2005 our pastor continued his series of sermons on the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) by preaching on patience. He did not make the following application but I wonder if the cynicism about the process and progress of freedom in Iraq is not an example of impatience. We North Americans are a McDonald's kind of people, we expect it now. Whatever one might say in defense of McDonald's food (not a great deal!), it is incredible that we have become so unaware of human history that we bring Big Mac expectations to such a tremendously difficult human achievement as liberty.

We forget that it took 450 years from the Magna Carta (1215) to Great Britain's Bill of Rights (1689) and almost 200 years after the

Declaration of Independence in 1776 for the United States of America to enact full civil rights for African-Americans (Civil Rights Act of 1965). After Germany and Japan were defeated in 1945 it took years to turn them into free and productive/prosperous nations. Examples could be multiplied. Perhaps we're spoiled with success. After the invasion of Iraq and defeat of Saddam Hussein's forces took only a few weeks, a "cleanup" of a year and a half culminating in free elections isn't all that bad. And still the Chicken Littles among us predict and wait for the falling sky. Why?

As I said, impatience. We want instant results. Even that seems remarkable when you come to think about it. Many people of what one could call a more progressive bent seem often to be infinitely patient with human foibles, failings and sins. They are wary of judgmentalism and plead for long suffering. A worthy reminder to all of us who might have shorter fuses. Yet often these same people are utopian in their insistence that racism, poverty, war, and AIDS be cured now and blame politicians, pharmaceutical companies, big business etc. when the progress is too slow, often failing even to acknowledge progress at all. It seems to me that this gets the possibility of conversion, renewal, change exactly upside down. People are image bearers of God and therefore responsible moral agents who can change much more readily than institutions or societies which have inbuilt structural resistance to renewal. (A little realistic dose of Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* would be helpful here.)

There is a long way to go in Iraq. Thank God for the deliverance of the Iraqi people from one of the most brutal and dangerous tyrants in the last century. Also thank God for those whose vision of liberty and willing heroic sacrifice is making it possible for the Iraqi people to live in hope that they will someday be free of fear.



Multiculturalism: The Road to Nowhere (1)

Harry Antonides

Multiculturalism is the masochistic celebration of Canadian nothingness.

(Gad Horowitz, in Reginald Bibby, *Mosaic Madness*, p. 92)

Depending on stereotype, ensuring that ethnic groups will preserve their distinctiveness in a gentle and insidious form of apartheid, multiculturalism has done little more than lead an already divided country down the path to further social divisiveness.

(Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions*, p. 90)

Canada is supposed to be the shining example of harmoniously merging a wide variety of ethnic, racial and religious communities into a peaceful and unified nation. We pride ourselves on being much superior to the American *melting pot* by fashioning a much more vibrant and colorful *mosaic*.

But reality is not quite that simple. To be sure, Canada has always been a country of immigrants. Most of us trace our roots back to other parts of the world. For some of us that requires a couple of centuries of backtracking. For many of us, the tracks from our countries of birth are still fresh.

After World War II a flood of immigrants began arriving in Canada. How to accommodate this large number of people who increasingly came from non-Western countries? At the same time English-French tensions called for a fresh approach. Hence the appointment of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963, which published its voluminous report in 1969.

A new definition

While its main focus was on the special status of Quebec within Canada, this Royal Commission went much further by proclaiming Canada to be a nation of not just two but many cultures. It did not take long before the concept of cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism, was elevated to the defining characteristic of Canada. And that's how a process was put into motion that has left many people scratching their heads.

Not surprisingly, this outcome did not please the Quebecois, since they would prefer to keep the limelight on just the two founding cultures. But then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau became an enthusiastic booster of the newly discovered insight. (Could it be that this wily enemy of Quebec nationalism knew that multiculturalism would help dilute the special status of Quebec in Canada?)

On October 8, 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced in the House of Commons that the Liberal government had accepted all the recommendations contained in Volume IV of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. He explained that "A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom

of Canadians." The Prime Minister went on to say that this policy would "help break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies...."

On the same day, the government adopted a statement of policy, "Appendix to Hansard," that amounted to an unqualified endorsement of the Prime Minister's comments. It noted that cultural diversity is to be treasured in contrast to what it called "assimilation programs forcing our citizens to forsake and forget the cultures they have brought to us."

The government further assured us that Canadian identity will not be undermined by multiculturalism. It declared that "cultural pluralism is the very essence of Canadian identity.... To say we have two official languages is not to say that we have two official cultures, and no particular culture is more 'official' than the other. A policy of multiculturalism must be a policy for all Canadians."

In 1973 the Ministry of Multiculturalism was established. In 1982 the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was amended to say that it must be interpreted to enhance "the multicultural heritage of Canadians."

In 1988 the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* became law, proclaiming that the policy of the government of Canada is to "recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society [and that] multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future."

(CMA 3(1) a, b)

Much has changed since the 1960s. The old Canada with its strong Anglo-Saxon and broadly Christian stamp has made way for a much more diverse population. How have the newfangled, "pluralist" policies worked out in practice? What has been gained – or lost? How do we truly evaluate the outcome of policies that are now almost four decades old?

We should all be able to agree that Canada's welcoming and open policies to its new arrivals is admirable. The generosity and goodwill that exists among neighbors of different races, nationalities and religions is something to be treasured and safeguarded, which is the responsibility of everyone of us. If this is what multiculturalism is all about, we should all be wholehearted supporters.

A new dogma

But much more is implied in the kind of multiculturalism that has been declared to be the defining characteristic of Canada. And therein lies the problem, of which the main one is that this policy as applied in Canada assumes the status of a sacred dogma that brooks no disagreement.

The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* describes dogma as follows: "1. a belief or set of beliefs held by an authority or group,

Technology

which others are expected to accept without argument. 2. an arrogant declaration of opinion." I think that these definitions apply here.

One may dislike my use of dogma, because it has unfavorable connotations to be called dogmatic. But the language of the policies and legislation is loaded with words which suggest that issues of fundamental meaning and substance are at stake here. Though the term "culture" can mean different things, the language used throughout indicates that "culture" does not only refer to the arts, different customs, cuisine, social conventions, and other outward expressions. In fact, it refers to something much more fundamental, that is, a whole way of life and a way of being a nation. The absolutist-sounding language leaves little room for a different conclusion.

Multiculturalism is said to ensure our freedom, form the base of our society, is the very essence of our identity, is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian identity, and provides invaluable resources in the shaping our future, and so on. This is the language of the true believers.

Four objections

I see at least four weighty problems with the assumptions and implications of multiculturalism as applied in Canada.

One. It is driven by a typically modern, or even post-modern, belief that all cultures are of equal value. Therefore, no single culture is better than any other. For example, we cannot say that largely "Christian," Western democracies are superior to other cultures. To make such a claim is now seen as cultural imperialism that is responsible for the injustice and oppression of the past.

The ideology undergirding this cultural equivalence, or relativism, makes it impossible to speak of better or worse, right or wrong. The practical effect is that we are living in a moral wasteland where no abiding standard of truth and goodness may be applied. But the human condition is such that we need to make choices and judgments about all manner of things. How to do that if we do not have a reliable standard by which to make such decisions? There are different ways to solve that dilemma.

In Canada we are attempting to resolve the challenge of living together in one nation by saying that all cultures are of the same value and must be honored by all. We call that multiculturalism, in contrast to what Canadian poet Clifton Joseph has described as the "Eurocentric and ultimately soft-sell white supremacist framework."

Two. This means that we now tiptoe

around all kinds of political and jurisdictional pressure points and no longer call a spade a spade. We change definitions or, as the late American Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has famously said, we have "defined deviancy downward."

For example, instead of using traditional concepts of justice, we now declare equality to be the uppermost principle. If people of certain national or racial backgrounds display particular tendencies to turn to a life of crime or family breakdown, we are forbidden to say anything about such facts. If we venture to break that taboo, we are quickly denounced as bigots and racists. That's what happens when you declare all cultures to be the same. It dispenses with the ability to make moral judgments. The main intended result is of course that it enables us to escape responsibility – or so we think.

The outcome is a culture of hypocrisy and doubletalk – and cowardice. That's why there is so little honest discussion about immigration and refugee policies in this country. Not to mention the crusade to declare same-sex relations equal to heterosexual marriages.

The irony is that it is now considered a sign of sophistication and broad-mindedness to deny all universal absolutes, whereas at the same time we are busy inventing our own brand of absolutes. We then declare ourselves to be progressive. Multiculturalism is one of such new absolutes.

Three. A further bitter irony is that multiculturalism as government policy has undermined the very integrity and substance of Canadian culture. Instead of insisting that newcomers become acquainted with Canadian history and institutions, we tell them that there is nothing distinctive or excellent about Canada.

Then secretary of state for multiculturalism, Sheila Finestone, stated on a CTV panel discussion on January 31, 1995, "In my view there isn't any one Canadian identity. Canada has no national culture." She received a lot of flack from the public. But she was only restating what Prime Minister Trudeau had said in 1971: "[T]here is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other."

Four. As a few brave critics have explained, multiculturalism has not led to more harmony and understanding but to the further fragmenting of this divided country. More about that in my next column. For those who want to look them up, I will be relying especially on the two books mentioned at the beginning of this article and on Jack Granatstein's *Who Killed Canadian History?*

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Synod and cell phones

It used to be that necessity was the mother of all invention, but now invention has become the mother of all necessity. I'm told there are one billion mobile phones across the planet. These cordless communicators have become the new necessity, the latest thing that we cannot imagine living without – the latest idol.

Old Order Mennonites have lengthy discussions about any new technology they allow into the community. My question is: if technology is re-shaping our lives – in both micro and macro ways – how come Reformed elders are not similarly reflecting on how this affects our Christian communities? Why are synods commissioning study committees on all sort of topics, but one of the greatest influences in our lives – new electronic technology – remains unexamined?

With the help of the web, I've gleaned three reflective remarks on how one technology – mobile phones – are changing who we are and how we live.

Symbolic bodyguard

The cell phone offers a certain amount of protection and safety – not only in the case of "cellular Samaritans" but for its users as well. Not only do solo commuters and wilderness adventurers have 911 accessibility in times of trouble, but parents can keep track of children more closely. It can cushion the experience of distressing events, soften good-byes, and shield users from unfamiliar settings.

With regards to the latter, a cell phone can act as a "barrier signal" to people one does not wish to interact with. Even just by holding a phone, vulnerable people – like a person alone on a late night subway – may feel relatively protected. Talking playfully to a friend on a cell communicates to any predators that one is not as "single" as one appears. Unfortunately, this may foster a false sense of security. Phones make poor defensive weapons in the face of real physical violence. We cannot let technology obscure our fragility, nor replace our dependency on God.

The inner cellular circle

Cell phones are a "conservative" technology in so far as they discourage one from engaging the strangers around oneself. Similarly, they are usually limited to communication with a small circle of people. Cell phones are very personal, and one gives the cell number to a select few, what might be called the "inner cellular circle."

This reproduces a type of interaction found in a village, where everybody knows everybody, conversations are breezy and fleeting, there are highly particular linguistic habits, and one is never far away from close relations. Mobile phones facilitate an "electronic cocooning" or a "nomadic intimacy" that would not otherwise be possible in a highly mobile society such as ours. The phone becomes one's "placeless presence" or "virtual place" in a village of intimates, one's personal network.

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



Also similar to pre-modern villages, cell phones allow one to be "punctuality free." Late arrival is no longer an urgent problem, and meetings on the whole can happen with less pre-planning. Life may become more fluid, flexible, and spontaneous.

Habits of the High-Tech Heart

For many, a cell phone on the waist or in the hand is a sign of elevated status. To have one's cell ring in the presence of others is a symbol of extra importance – it means other people need you, or you are making the deals, and drumming up big business. Instantly, those local to you are of secondary significance.

In contradistinction to this self-image, people with active cell phones can be perceived by others to be as irritating as the melodies that come from the device. A cell phone that interrupts a presentation is rude, not impressive. The all-too-common "cell yell" which intimates one's personal life to everyone in ear-shot, is less appealing than the roar of traffic. The conversations are usually trivial, and as one survey demonstrated, a prime channel for gossip.

At their worst, cell phones can become a social addiction, not to mention they can cause accidents if they are used improperly in motor vehicles. The long hours of solitude for commuters are now an option rather than an inevitability. We need not be "alone" ever again.

Cell phones are one technology that is changing how we live and relate. While I do not have any conclusive remarks on its use, I wonder what a study committee to synod might say about the proliferation of electronic communication devices. Quentin Schultz suggests in *Habits of the High-Tech Heart* (Baker, 2002) that the quest for efficiency and convenience ultimately erode godly character. In this respect, the issue is much deeper than just "how you use it."

I imagine Reformed Christians would have a different view from the Mennonites, but I hope they would also have a different view from broader contemporary culture. Perhaps synod would say we value face-to-face communion – high touch – more than high-tech mobility. Yet they might conclude that the cellular phone mitigates the alienation the motor vehicle has brought to our lives – noting paradoxically how new technology becomes the solution to problems technology created in the first place. Finally, they may endorse it with a special code of courtesy – call it "cellular etiquette." In that way technology is used by human beings, and not the other way around.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Church

Boesak re-admitted to church ministry

Donwald Pressly

Piketberg, South Africa (ENI) – Prominent anti-apartheid activist Allan Boesak has been readmitted as a church minister after the clearing of his criminal record by South African President Thabo Mbeki.

Boesak, a former president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, was ordained on Sunday in front of a large crowd of well-wishers at the Uniting Reformed Church – a branch of South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church – at Piketberg in the Western Cape.

He had served two years in nearby Malmesbury prison after being found guilty of fraud and the theft of just over 400,000 rand (US\$65,000) in donor funds paid to his Foundation for Peace and Justice. He was granted a pardon by Mbeki in January.

"Our church will be a beacon of hope to South Africa," Boesak said during his acceptance speech.

The three-hour-long service at Piketberg was led by the Rev. Walter Philander, the congregation's presiding minister.

Philander has said that Boesak's return to active service in the church has nothing to do with the presidential pardon, but marked his re-entry after his pastoral duties lapsed when he went into politics 10 years ago.

Addressing the colored Afrikaans-language congregation, Philander spoke in Boesak's praise: "We need freedom from hunger, hopelessness and economic bondage."

Boesak was one of God's chosen instruments to free the people from this bondage, he said.

A guest of honor in the 3000 strong congregation was Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town, who said Boesak's "period of exile" was over.

Ndungane hosted a cocktail party for Boesak at his official residence on Friday, also attended by former Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu who paid tribute to Boesak's role in the anti-apartheid United Democratic Front in the 1980s.

Neither Boesak nor the church elders at the service spoke directly of his prison term.

Outside, a member of the church who did not want to be named but identified himself as a worker on a nearby farm said some members of the congregation were a little uncomfortable with Boesak's recent past.

Nevertheless, he said, "he did so much for us" that the general feeling was not to focus on just one event in his life "but on the contribution that Boesak made" to uplift the people.

Sudan's churches challenged to work together after civil war

By Fredrick Nzwili

Nairobi (ENI) – A meeting of Sudanese Christian leaders in Nairobi has ended with a warning that churches risk being marginalised if they cannot draw up a clear strategy after the end of a two-decade-long civil war.

"Sudan is at the most dangerous stage now," said Rev. Mvume Dandala, general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, which hosted the two-day meeting. "The churches must unite to fortify the peace."

The 21-year-long civil war, in which predominantly Christian and animist southern Sudanese struggled for autonomy from the mainly Islamic north, also led to the formation of two ecumenical church groupings for the country.

The Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), based in the capital, Khartoum, formally represented all of the country's churches, but the civil war meant it was unable to operate outside government-controlled areas.

A separate body with headquarters based in Nairobi, the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), was set up for the south of Sudan.

Still, leaders of the two groupings cautioned against hasty action to unite the two councils.

"It could confuse communities at this critical juncture," said Haruun Ruun, executive secretary of the New Sudan Council of Churches in Nairobi. "It therefore calls for a gradual and smooth approach."

Melaku Kifle, of the World Council of Churches, said the Sudanese churches needed to articulate a clear vision of how they would work together in the future or risk marginalisation.

"The major challenge is how to further strengthen our ecumenical working relationships at the local, national and continental levels," he told Ecumenical News International.

Isaak Kongur Kenyi, executive secretary of the justice and peace commission of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference, urged churches in other parts of Africa to provide support to Christians in Sudan.

Solidarity from African churches was lagging behind that received from Europe and North America in the wake of the Sudan peace agreement signed on January 9.

Human and economic development needed to alleviate problems in Africa

RIMINI (Zenit.org)

– Rodolfo Casadei, co-author of *Africa: Forgotten Conflicts and Builders of Peace*, discusses reasons for the conflicts that plague Africa as well as hope for development and progress in the future.

In this interview with ZENIT, Casadei, an expert in African affairs, relates some of the conclusions he arrived at in writing the book.



Women fleeing Congo conflict

Q: According to your study, what are the causes of the conflicts in Africa?

Casadei: We must be clear say that the most widespread explanations are not credible: those which identify the cause of African wars with tribalism and those that point to interferences of neo-colonial external interests in Africa.

Both explanations, although of different political origin, stem from the same racist paradigm: the paradigm of the African as the eternal child. This paradigm served to justify the need for colonialism, but now it also promotes a progressive paradigm that sees the white race as eternally guilty and the African as eternally innocent.

Q: What, then, are the real causes?

Casadei: They are innumerable. I will try to mention some of them. The first relates to Africa's traditional economy, which has very low productivity. Lack of productivity fosters the tendency to appropriate another's product to compensate for lack of one's own.

Slavery finds roots in a subsistence economy, as the possession of slaves allows for the increase in domestic productivity. In fact, the objective of some wars between neighbors has been to acquire slaves.

Then there is the makeup of the population, in particular the age categories: the conflicts are stronger where the incidence of young people is higher. The average age in Sub-Saharan Africa is about 17. The average age in Italy is 40.2 years, and the average age globally is 26.5 years. It is a society where power is monopolized by the elderly. War becomes a means of social climbing for young people.

There is also polarization between groups of the population, for example, the conflicts between those who cultivate the land and the cattle dealers. During the dry seasons, which are frequent, the cattle dealers invade the farmers' lands and vice versa, with constant conflicts.

Q: What are the causes of the new African conflicts?

Casadei: The main problem is the crisis of the modern African welfare state. When the government cannot distribute right and left the resources among ethnic and other pressure groups, it substitutes the politics of arms for the arms of politics.

Unfortunately, resources have depleted since the end of the Cold War and the price of primary

commodities has fallen. This is especially due to the inefficient use of financial aid and foreign investment.

According to the U.N., the amount of capital exported illegally from Africa is equivalent to more than half of all the African external debt.

Much of the foreign exchange that has arrived in Africa, thanks to international loans or the export of oil products, has been siphoned into bank accounts in Switzerland or England, hidden in tax havens or invested in real estate abroad.

So, as the capacity to distribute resources has collapsed, the African state has collapsed.

This crisis of the state has brought a new political elite to power – the "war lords." They are "political-military entrepreneurs" who use war for personal power and wealth.

Q: Do you mean that there are people who invest in war?

Casadei: Precisely. There are businessmen who invest money in arms and soldiers (men and children), a risky investment but very lucrative. In the '90s, we had war lords in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Angola.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we have chiefs of general staff who transform themselves into war lords, as is the case of the two wars of the Congo, where they have appropriated the resources of former Zaire.

Q: What solution is there to such a critical situation?

Casadei: The remedy against war is economic and human development. There are several conditions to achieve this development: the first is to create space for development for African civil society and the world of international cooperation.

The second, is the political and economic evolution that leads to the modern state, the state of law, in the wake of the post-colonial failure.

Cooperation and security could be guaranteed with an agreement of collaboration between Africa and Europe. Europe should understand the strategic importance of a new collaboration agreement.

When Africa cannot guarantee it, international forms of tutelage should intervene. Wherever the survival of whole human groups is in danger and the prospect of development is totally compromised, humanitarian interference is not only licit, but a duty.

Church

Catholic village in India under fundamentalist siege

AMRAVATI, India (Zenit.org) – Hindu fundamentalists are subjecting the people of a Catholic village to threats and attacks, says a bishop in the state of Maharashtra.

Rajura is the only Catholic village in Amravati, one of the six divisions of Maharashtra with an independent municipal administration.

The Catholics, all tribals, are descendants of migrants from Madhya Pradesh; their families have been in the village for centuries. They now live in fear for their lives, if they do not reconvert to the Hinduism of their ancestors.

"All the people in the village are Catholics, very poor, illiterate, mainly agricultural laborers, but very faithful to the religion," Bishop Edwin Colaço told AsiaNews.

"A few days ago, a Munni, or Hindu holy man, from Ayodhya ... held a huge religious meeting here; it was well attended" by Hindus, the bishop said.

"The saffron-clad, spear-bearing Munni attacked the Catholic Church and denounced the missionaries," he said. "He launched into a tirade against the Adivasi [tribals] of Rajura, alleging that missionaries had originally converted them by force, and said that it was his mission to reconvert them to Hinduism."

Bishop Colaço, 67, believes that the event was "very well planned by the Hindu Religious Convention. The Munni had done his homework well and knew the place. ... He urged Hindu villagers

to 'kill the Christian Adivasi with swords.'

The group "drove into the Christian village in jeeps, carrying swords and shouting fanatical Hindu slogans. But they found only women, since the men were away at work," the bishop said.

"They threatened to kill the women if they did not follow them to the Hindu meeting. The terrified women were then huddled into the jeeps and forcibly brought before the Munni," continued Bishop Colaço.

The prelate said that the "situation is very serious. The Munni has threatened the people of neighboring villages, saying they would be ostracized and would be fined 10,000 rupees if they maintained any contact with tribal Christians."

For Bishop Colaço of Amravati, "this is a violation of human rights. Christian Adivasi are poor and illiterate and depend on Hindus for employment. If they are ostracized, they will be denied their means of livelihood. Worse still, many Adivasi have daughters and sisters married to Hindu men and living in other villages. Now the fundamentalists have forbidden any contact with their families."

Bishop Colaço said he wrote the Union Home Minister and the chief minister of Maharashtra asking them to investigate the escalating violence against Christians in Amravati. He also approached the Indian bishops' conference requesting that it intervene.

Will the CRC become a "Peace Church"?

Peter Noteboom

"Let's start with the whole notion of peace; develop a theology and practice of peace," said Rev. Herman Keizer, Director of CRC Chaplaincy Ministries. Rev. Keizer, a member of the CRC synodical committee to study peace and war was one of twenty-five members and friends of the Christian Reformed Church who gathered in Edmonton, Alberta this January to talk about peace – building it, keeping it, living it.

With several other members of the synodical committee present, participants carefully walked through what inspires their own biblical convictions about peace, celebrated practices of peacebuilding that Christian Reformed communities are already doing, offered recommendations to the committee on how their report could be strengthened, and crafted the beginnings of a proposed learning agenda for the church.

To that end, participants suggested to the committee an even more pronounced emphasis on peace and peacebuilding in the report. They noted an urgent need for the CRC to articulate a theology and a practical agenda for the CRC to pursue.

Some participants described the discovery of the "just peacemaking ethic" as a real breakthrough. "The just peacemaking ethic changes the focus from entrenched positions of pacifism versus just war, to what do we all agree we need to be doing to work for peace," said Dr. Glen Stassen, who holds the Lewis Smedes chair of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The Peacebuilding consultation followed a school-wide two-day Interdisciplinary Studies conference put on by The King's University College called "Wage Peace." University students were treated to presentations by Senator Douglas Roche, an esteemed Canadian peace activist, Rev. Dale Lang, whose son was killed in a school shooting and in nationally televised events publicly forgave his son's killer, and Prof. Glen Stassen, who is a prolific publisher and lecturer on Just Peacemaking.

Both The King's consultation and the CRC peacebuilding consultation were soaked in worship, prayer and praise, essential bread for the journey. What could a new focus on peace look like for the Christian Reformed Church? Can a church not be a peace church when the Gospel's main character proclaims the Year of the Lord's Favor and reveals a culminating vision of healing and restoration for the nations, a Shalom of heaven and earth? What would it mean for our life and worship? Hold the synodical committee on peace and war and its members in your own prayers, as they work to re-articulate and strengthen new directions for peacebuilding in the Christian Reformed Church.

The event was sponsored by the synodical committee and OSJHA, hosted by The King's University College and Edmonton friends, and facilitated by Peter Noteboom of the Canadian Council of Churches, Global Learning Partners, and member of First Christian Reformed Church in Toronto. The CRC synodical study committee on peace and war can be found online.

Guyana: the forgotten flood



(Barnabas) – The most severe flood for over a century has affected nearly 40 percent of the population of the South American country of Guyana. More than three weeks after the floods began, water still lies waist-deep or higher in some areas. People are looking to the churches for help.

While the world's eyes have focused on the appalling devastation caused by the December 26th Indian Ocean tsunami, abnormally heavy rainfall in Guyana has caused a prolonged flood in its heavily populated, low-lying, coastal areas. According to the latest figures 293,988 people have been affected, that is 39% of the country's total population.

Water over a metre deep is still lying in many parts of the East Coast of Demarara County. Parts of the capital Georgetown, on the west bank of the Demarara river, were also affected as well as areas of the Demarara river's east bank. Crops (sugar cane and rice) have been destroyed.

With flood waters full of garbage, sewage and dead animals, there is fear of a serious outbreak of disease. An estimated twelve people have already died of leptospirosis. Alligators and anaconda snakes pose further hazards in some areas.

The government has organized a program of distribution of food rations. With medical teams and mass distribution of antibiotics, they are seeking to prevent epidemics, but doctors are urging a mass evacuation of the East Coast. More pumps are being imported to tackle the remaining water.

Christians assisting

Churches in and near the affected areas have been providing help from the beginning of the disaster, mainly in the form of food. Using supplies from the government aid program and donations from church members, they have set up

kitchens to provide hot food for those who cannot cook in their own homes. They have also distributed dry rations to those able to cook. "People are coming to the church from six o'clock in the morning until midnight, asking for food. The Christians have given from their own pockets to help them," said a pastor in Bachelor's Adventure on the East Coast. Other Christians across Guyana are also sending help through the churches in the stricken areas. A pastor spoke of the wonderful encouragement it was to receive help from Christians he had never met or even heard of before.

The orderly and equitable way in which churches have organized their aid distribution has been commended by government officials as well as by local communities. Christians have made sure to help not only fellow-believers but also those of all faiths and races.

Barnabas Fund of the U.K. sent £60,000 to its partners in Guyana to be used by the Guyanese churches to provide the most urgent needs of food (rice, flour, beans, peas, plantains, cassava, eddoes etc.) and bottled water, as well as disinfectant and small kerosene stoves. Long-term assistance may be needed for some months after the floods have abated for those who have lost their crops and farm animals.

For the Christian community, it will also be necessary to repair the many church buildings which have been damaged by the water, and to help support pastors. Where churches are flooded, no services can be held, so no offerings are taken up, and the pastor has no income.

Barnabas Fund issued an urgent appeal to provide support to pastors, repair church buildings and help those displaced from their homes in the Guyana flood.

60th Anniversary

Troublesome rednecks and stupid Canadian farmers

Harry der Nederlanden

Two very early bits from the *Canadian Calvinist*. The first editor, Paul De Kock, had a sense of humor as well as a pastor's passion to squeeze a moral out of anything. The last item in the Dec. 15, 1945 issue is about the death of Pietje B. taken from the *Edmonton Journal*. Pietje "swallowed a piece of wire and it caused a stomach infection," leading to her death.

"Pietje B. is (or was) a Holstein cow valued at \$21,000. Her death notice drew our attention not only for her apparent Dutch descent, but also because it illustrates that preciousness is no guarantee against death. Let us Canadian Calvinists keep foreign substances from our natural and spiritual constitutions. They might prove fatal in both respects."

Among the "foreign substances" the editor worries about in later issues are Catholics, public education ... and Canadian soldiers. They were apparently irresistible to Dutch girls, even to those from Good Reformed homes.

The CC of Jan. 1946 celebrates the start of work on a big dam on the St. Mary River which would provide irrigation for another 225,000 acres near Burdett, Alberta. "Since the Burdett church has dwindled because its members moved away in view of persistent droughts," writes the editor, "we wonder whether the above if realized will mean the survival and revival of that congregation." So he was hoping a little extra water would make Burdett grow.

In the same issue and in the Feb. and Aug. issues of CC, the editor expresses some strong anti-Catholic sentiments. He reports on a speech given by a member of the Canadian Protestant League at the Edmonton CRC. He comments that although the man didn't have a definitely Calvinistic worldview, he was right about the threat of Roman Catholicism:

"Rome's doctrine is downright false in many respects and puts man's salvation in jeopardy. Its claim to absolute power is a real danger to our civic freedom. Its program and its vested powers in the east constitute a serious threat not only to Protestantism but also to the very existence of a free Canada."

Such sentiments were widespread in the Alberta of my youth and kept the Social Credit Party in

power for many years.

Another CC quotes from an article in the *Federation Messenger* by P.Y. De Jong, who warns young people of a fearful battle.

"There is first of all the increase of Roman Catholicism to menace a true going forward with Christ. This church has recently again begun to show her colors more clearly.... Many of her army and navy chaplains ... have shown more zeal than all the Pharisees in Jerusalem of old for the making of proselytes. Likewise, they through their men and committees are among the strongest forces in politics today. Such movies as 'The Bells of St. Mary's' show how even this great industry openly caters to the Roman church....

"And surely there is no more totalitarian body on the whole earth than the Roman church. She claims to have the right as an institution to control all things — goods and men, body and soul, this world and the next."

So in 1946 the catholic Church was ranked alongside atheism, secularism and communism as the greatest threats in the world to Calvinist youth.

Troublesome rednecks

J.K. Van Baalen, one of the leaders of the CRC and never one to mince words, shared some of his impressions after visiting some churches in Alberta in 1946.

"You have kept more close to Holland than we have," he wrote after returning to the U.S. "This has its advantages and its disadvantages. Advantages, because the headquarters of Reformed theology and church life have been in the Netherlands for many decades, though that is gradually changing. Disadvantages, since many immigrants lack culture and vision, hence they think they know it all, and that they alone know something. Consequently, they have often proved the most troublesome church members."

Ah, the voice of experience. Note, too, that he doesn't single out the Frisians. I learned from my father that in the early days of our church some consistory meetings raged on till almost 3 a.m. And then a few evenings later there would be a meeting of the Christian Labour Association of Canada in a number of different places. Already it is encountering resistance from existing unions, says F.P. Fuykschot. But employers too are not cooperative.

families. It's amazing.

Christian social action

There seemed to be no end to what the Reformed immigrants were willing to tackle. Here are some excerpts from an article written by A. Bisschop of Chatham, Ontario in the Dec. 1950 issue of CC:

"Since we immigrants from the Netherlands were for years able to enjoy a well developing Christian trade union and a strong Christian alliance of farmers and gardeners, we feel a lack here in Canada. Especially because there is still a lot lacking in terms of our rights before the law, not just for our people but for all Canadians. It is true that there are labor unions here and organizations for farmers, but are they acceptable to us? In Holland we have for years been nurtured by our own organizations based on Christian convictions. Can we now accommodate ourselves here to these Canadian organizations? I don't believe so."

Bisschop goes on to urge his fellow immigrants to join the International Christian Trade Union in creating a Christian union that will also mobilize other Christians in Canada. He argues that "even though most of us eventually hope to buy our own farms, that doesn't relieve us of the obligation to do our duty as laborers." Many, he suggests, may not be able to become farmers for a long time, if ever.

"There is much to be done in this area to eliminate injustices, such as untimely dismissal, eviction from one's house, unemployment during the winter, financial support during illness or accident, wages that are set unilaterally. Come on, friends, we must build for and with one another. It's not just for financial benefits for our families, it's also because we feel that there is injustice in this great and beautiful country, and for Christ's sake we may not be silent about that. We must take on this task believing that also in this respect with God's blessing we can be helpful for all the people."

The cover story of the July 1, 1953 issue describes the earliest attempts to organize the Christian Labour Association of Canada in a number of different places. Already it is encountering resistance from existing unions, says F.P. Fuykschot. But employers too are not cooperative.



The Christian Reformed congregation of Wyoming, Ontario took possession of this building on August 26, 1954. It had become an organized church only two years earlier. Its first minister was Rev. Henry Numan. CC reported that "someone" from the States presented the church a pulpit Bible. Rev. Numan chose as his text Matt. 12:6: "But I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple." The church was built by D. Veenendaal of Sarnia, and CC calls it one of the most beautiful in the area.

"But the opposition we run into every day is from people whom we should have expected help and cooperation," he laments.

They object that the existing unions are too strong. Fuykschot admits that is true, but he adds: "Everyone who stands at the beginning of something would love to know whether he will achieve what he has taken on, that's also true for those who have begun the CLA. But the future is wholly hidden from us. The Holy Scriptures say: 'Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off.'

"If the CLA could show that within a certain number of years it could possess a considerable measure of influence in this country and realize its ideals, no doubt thousands would line up begging to join. But that's not how things are. We see by faith. We sow in hope. Because we must. Because we cannot do otherwise. And we leave the outcome to God."

Quite a few people of stature have spoken of the triumphalism of those neo-Kuyperian immigrants and pioneers. This does not strike me as triumphalism. It is faith pure and simple.

Stupid Canadians

Although they praised the virtues of their new country, the newcomers were not blind to the failings and injustices of this country — nor to the shortcomings of their hosts. Here's an excerpt from an account given by a Dutch immigrant farmer from the Netherlands said

grant, P. Tulner, after working on a farm in Quebec for six months.

"The Canadian farmer is a hard worker, but he doesn't use his head enough.... He spends lots of money on unnecessary things and pinches pennies on necessities. When something breaks, he tosses it aside so that when he urgently needs it, it still needs to be repaired, so usually several hours are lost. When winter comes the machines are put away dirty as they are. The binder needs urgent repairs, the seeder has a broken wheel, and the corn planter has a worn cam ... the threshing machine also badly needs repairs....

"This summer I sometimes spent several hours chasing calves that had almost wandered off to the ends of the earth because the fence is broken in many places. Even though now that it's winter we have time to fix it, nothing is done.... The roof of the hay barn leaks....

Seven miles from us there's another Dutch family that we visit now and then, and they see many of the same uneconomical things on the farms here. As long as the farmer works like this, his farm will never grow, and if he doesn't watch out he will lose ground no matter how hard he works."

He isn't the only one to remark on the inefficiency of many Canadian farmers, although others write in to say that it's not like that everywhere in Canada. Incidentally, not long ago a recent immigrant farmer from the Netherlands said

Lifestyle

A theology of the bike

Peter Schuurman

Cycling can put the fear of God in you. One sunny day last fall I was cycling down some lonely country roads, breathing in the fresh farm air. I was passing some innocent-looking farm house, dreaming bike touring dreams, when a barking torpedo shot out the side of the home and headed straight for my bike - or more specifically, for my fat-free legs. The animal was just a blur with teeth, and the first thought I had was that you can't kick when you have clipless pedals. You feel as vulnerable as meat on wheels.

It happened to me four times in three hours. Four man-eating dogs chasing me down the road. Thankfully, I had enough of a head start in each case to escape without having to unclasp canine jaws from one of my limbs. But it sure gives your ticker a sudden jolt.

Hopefully, large numbers of people on bikes intimidate territorial animals.

This summer a large peloton of cyclists will be riding "sea to sea" in honor of the CRC's 100th anniversary in Canada. No doubt the predominant feeling of the cyclists will be exhilaration and joy. But it is also a dangerous project. When cycling anywhere, your first priority is to pay full attention to the road. You never know what might jump out at you.

This is similar to the task of theology. Theology, although literally "the study of God", can be understood as the art of paying attention to our entire life before the face of God. It is a mindfulness towards our reading of the Bible and our reading of the creation.

All Christians are theologians. Says Howard Stone and James Duke in their book *How to Think Theologically* (Fortress, 1996): "Theology is a seeking after understanding - a process of thinking about life in the light of the faith that Christians engage in because of their calling ... it is a craft ... a matter of personalized, conversational thinking about shared convictions." Theology is reading the world with the spectacles of faith.

Bicycle Jesus

I stumbled on a less-than-reverent website called "Bicycle Jesus." The title startles the ears as we would not necessarily put those two words together. But that is exactly what a theology of the bicycle would do: put Jesus and the bike in the same picture and see what conversation arises from the encounter. This is especially important for those who look at life from over the handle-bars.

Nothing in life stands neutral before Jesus. Conversely, everything we make and do functions as an idol or an icon, spiritually speaking. This is more than the question: "What would Jesus ride?" Although it



Paster Peter develops his theology of the bike

may be one place to begin. I'll admit from the start I am biased in this review. I love bicycling, and I hope to cycle across our fair country this summer, even if my bike proves to be a dog magnet.

I do realize one can idolize the bike: some people are obsessed with bicycling - they practically worship the equipment, the fashions, the big names, and the wild stories. Moreover, bikes can be too fast - you can see so much more if you walk slowly. They are, by their very design, made for a culture of individuals (there are no bikes for a trinity). Finally, the tons of used bicycle metal and rubber do not recycle or decompose well. Bicycles - and their riders - are far from innocent.

I am reminded of Psalm 20:7, where the poet declares: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." The bicycle, as an iron horse, or a horse-less chariot, is not the primary means of salvation. Neither am I one of those people who blithely say "it's just a tool - it all depends on how you use it." All technologies change and shape our society in particular ways. Where you sit or stand with respect to them affects your opinion of them. But I will say this: the bicycle is one of the few technologies with a surplus of redemptive possibilities. A theology of the bike could take a number of routes. For this short essay, I want to focus on three themes: bicycling as liberating, holy, and apocalyptic.

The bike: glorious and free

"A bicycle is the long-sought means of transportation for all of us who have runaway hearts," says Lance Armstrong in his later book *Every Second Counts*. "Our first bike is a matter of curb-jumping, puddle-smashing liberation; its freedom from supervision, from car pools and curfews. It's

a merciful release from reliance on parents, one's own way to the movies or a friend's house. More plainly, it's the first chance we have to choose our own direction."

Bike riding is an experience of the liberation of God. Every time you jump on the saddle and race off down the road you participate in your own small exodus. With the wind billowing in your jacket and the sun warming your helmet, you are tasting a good gift of God. "Why does any kid love a bike?" Asks Lance Armstrong again. "It's liberation and independence, your first set of wheels. A bike is freedom to roam, without rules and without adults."

Automobiles have no such freedom. They require licenses, ignitions, and maintained asphalt roads. When you drive, you must follow the lines and lights, and you cannot fit on the bike paths that grace our parks. Cars take away our freedom in another way: when we assume they are the only way to move around town. The car, an unimaginable machine to our ancestors, has become unimaginable to live without. Automobiles, if idolized in this way, are fueled by fatalism rather than freedom.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free," says Paul in Galatians 5:1. Christ frees us from slavery to false dependencies and opens our lives up to abundant, adventurous life. The bicycle can be an icon of that divine freedom.

Holy riders

Farmer poet Wendell Berry explains that the word 'health,' in fact, comes from the same Indo-European root as 'heal,' 'whole,' and 'holy.' In a world that is fragmenting, overspecialized, and disconnected, holiness can mean being set apart for God-like wholeness and health. This is certainly the character of a cyclist's world.

"The bicycle is a curious vehicle," said

U.S. Olympic cyclist John Howard. "Its passenger is its engine." Cycling expands the lungs, exercises the heart muscle, and funnels fresh air in and around the whole body. If you cycle for more than an hour three times a week, you not only look better and live better, you feel better. Cyclists are pedaling towards holiness.

We cannot stop at the health and wholeness of the individual, however. Berry put it this way: "I believe that the community - in its fullest sense: a place and all its creatures - is the smallest unit of health and that to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms." In this sense, bicycling rates high again. The two-wheeled vehicle can last for years and years with good maintenance. It does not leave a trail of smoke behind it. It parks easily. It opens your eyes to creation in a way that driving behind a wheel at 100 km/hour in a covered compartment never could. It is high-touch, low-tech, and has low impact on the earth. Finally, it brings people together in what might be called "a fellowship of the wheel." In sum, biking is a holy, wholesome community activity.

If the direction of culture today is away from outdoor living and regular exercise and towards closure indoors and virtual reality, the kingdom of God pulls us in the opposite direction: towards deep connection with ourselves and the creation. In this sense, the bicycle lends itself to kingdom paths. H. G. Wells puts it succinctly when he predicted "cycle tracks will abound in Utopia." Bill Nye the public TV Science Guy put it this way: "Bicycling is a big part of the future. It has to be. There is something wrong with a society that drives a car to work out in a gym."

Two-wheeled Armageddon

Bicycling is liberating. Bicycling is holy. Finally, bicycling is apocalyptic. Not just because we are on the edge of environmental collapse and more appropriate technologies like bicycles symbolize that urgency, but for another reason.

When I use the word apocalyptic here, what I mean to say is that there is nothing complacent about bicycling. On a bicycle, the End is always near.

Think of it this way. While cars are the third leading cause of death in Canada, they do not whisper rumors of the End Times with the same conviction as bicycles. Automobiles have large compartments of steel between oneself and the offending world. In a car, you are lulled into the illusion of power and safety. Bicycles come with no such illusions. Any seasoned cyclist knows that they are only an open car door away from the next life.

"Get a bicycle," said Mark Twain. "You will not regret it - if you live." This is essentially the same foreboding with which this short essay began: recall the four dogs

Lifestyle

of the apocalypse chasing me down the country lane. It's not just dogs, either: it is gigantic trucks, rain and sleet, loose gravel, potholes, box vans, and over-the-handlebar summersaults at 60 km/hour. Road rashes can last for weeks, and may permanently scar, yet these asphalt wounds are the badges given to the fortunate.

Perhaps I overstate the case. Yet you cannot argue that bicycling returns humanity to a keen awareness of its very real vulnerability. There is nothing to shield the cyclist from the weather, and there is no barrier between one's body and colliding objects. Think of it this way: at any given moment, a cyclist is only touching land in two small spaces, a total surface area of approximately 6 square centimeters. Thus to cycle is to be ready for injury, and bicycle safety is never an option on bike tours. "Keep watch" is ancient wisdom for those who risk the bicycle.

Disciples as bicycle couriers?

So ends our brief introduction to a theology of the bike. No doubt there remain many questions to be asked. For instance, Does God love bicycles? If Jesus had come in our modern times, would the disciples have been bicycle couriers rather than fishermen? Is there such a thing as a "Christian bicycle?"

I leave these questions for the scholars. I do, however, want to close with a bicycle tale. I found a short story on the net about a Zen teacher who saw five of his students returning from the market, riding their bicycles. When they arrived at the monastery and dismounted, the teacher asked the students: "Why are you riding your bicycles?"

The first student replied: "The bicycle is carrying this sack of potatoes. I am glad that I do not have to carry them on my back!"

The teacher praised the student. "You are a smart boy. When you grow old, you will not walk hunched over like I do."

The second student replied: "I love to watch the trees and fields pass by as I roll down the path!"

The teacher commended the second student, "Your eyes are open, and you see the world."

The third student replied: "When I ride my bicycle, I am content to chant the prayers of our tradition."

The teacher gave his praise to the third student, "Your mind will roll with the ease of a newly trued wheel."

The fourth student replied: "Riding my bicycle, I live in harmony with all sentient beings."

The teacher was pleased, and said to the fourth student, "You are riding on the golden path of non-harming."

The fifth student replied: "I ride my bicycle to ride my bicycle."

The teacher then sat at the feet of the fifth student, and said to him: "I am your student."

We can glean much wisdom from this Zen story. While it does elaborate a little on the liberating and holy aspects of cycling, it points – for me, at least – to another, more simple truth: the joy of riding. The best bike rides are when you forget about yourself, your worries, and even time itself, and sail into a prayerful delight with all creation. I think a paraphrase of the Olympic runner and missionary Eric Liddel says it best: "God made me for a purpose – for mission. But he also made me fast, and I feel his pleasure when I bike."

Peter Schuurman, in partnership with Peter Slofstra, has been designated chaplain for the "Sea to Sea With the CRC" Bike Tour this summer. He does not bike in the snow.

Bike tour broadens invitation: CRC friends also welcome

Have you ever been invited to a birthday party that promotes Christian unity and the expansion of God's Kingdom?

Now you have.

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) is marking its 100th anniversary in Canada this year and it is inviting interested bicyclists to join the celebration by riding "Sea to Sea with the CRC."

More than 150 cyclists are already signed up from Christian Reformed churches to ride from Vancouver to Halifax, June 23-Sept. 4, in the largest cross-Canada cycling event ever held.

Organizers are aiming for 257 cyclists to go across the country, equal to the number of CRC congregations and ministry centres in Canada.

"There's room on the road," said Al Karsten, a director of Christian Reformed World Missions and the man who dreamed up the idea of a cross-country bike tour. "And we want to extend the invitation beyond the CRC."

Persons interested in joining the "Sea to Sea" tour

may apply by filling out the application form available online at www.SeatoSea.org or by calling 1-888-CRC-BIKE. The deadline to apply is Feb. 28, 2005.

Prospective riders must support the tour's three objectives: celebrating the faithfulness of God's ministry through the past 100 years in the CRC; promoting unity among congregations; and supporting the growth of God's Kingdom through planting of new churches.

Cyclists also are expected to raise funds to be used in support of the CRC's mission of planting new churches in communities across Canada. The suggested goal is \$1,000 per week, for a total of \$10,000 per rider.

The 7,140-kilometre tour route begins in Vancouver on June 23 and finishes just over 10 weeks later in Halifax. Cyclists can ride the entire route or sign up for one of three sections. Much more information on this vehicle-supported tour is available online.

Think Before You Feel

Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer

"That's your job" four-year-old Sarah said to me as I scolded her for leaving wet training pants on the bathroom floor.

"Oh no it's not" I replied. "Those are your pants, so you should have to take care of them."

"You shouldn't have become a mom if you didn't want to do it" was Sarah's reply as she stomped off to put her pants in the garbage.

Sarah's words stuck in my mind as I went through my day. Did I expect people to do things that were really my responsibility? Certainly Sarah could pick up her own training pants, but I wondered how often my expectations of others were unfair.

Earlier in the week I had been angry when my mother didn't want to babysit while I went to a doctor appointment. I was upset that she wouldn't help me out, but was it her job to care for my children?

I was annoyed when my husband didn't clean up the dinner dishes one night while I was away at a church meeting...but was that his job? We had a clear agreement between us that the kitchen was my domain.

When my friend didn't send me a birthday card, I felt cheated. But did she owe me a card?

It's easy to get caught up in what we think others should do for us, but sometimes we need to step back and gain some perspective. Favors are not owed to us. Acts of kindness, or helpful hands given out of love, are not something we should demand or even expect. Those things are gifts. When someone offers to help, it should be met with gratitude, not expectation. It was not my mother's job to

watch my children, nor my husband's to do the dishes. My friend may have simply forgotten my birthday. Her omission didn't mean she cared about me less. It would have been nice if my mother, husband and friend had done things differently, but for me to be angry that they didn't, was simply not rational. My anger would have better been directed at the situation rather than at them.

As a psychologist, I see many people who allow their irrational expectations of others to cloud their judgement, leading them to frustration and sadness. They put their own interpretations on events, forming their impressions out of their insecurities rather than basing them on reality.

Rather than allowing emotion to dictate what we think, why not let our thoughts tell us how to feel instead? As it turned out, my mother had previous plans the day I asked her to babysit, my husband was busy taking care of our four children, and my friend was out-of-town (I received a belated birthday card). I was not being cheated out of what was due me, and it was not a matter of lack of love or consideration that caused those situations. If I had taken the time to see that, I would have never directed negative emotions toward my loved ones.

I have explained to Sarah that throwing out her training pants when she has an "accident" is her job. She now understands that although she'd like me to help her out sometimes, being angry when I don't doesn't make a lot of sense. She's grateful for the times I do her job for her, but no longer expects or demands it. Hopefully I can follow her example in relation to my own responsibilities in the future.

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Biblical wisdom

I know that I do not know

A.A. Van Ruler

I perceived that this also was a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow. (KJV)

But I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief. (NIV)

Ecclesiastes 1:17b,18

Behind this section of Ecclesiastes lurks that unique process of duplication that is so typical to being human. Man [human beings] not only is but knows that he is. He not only acts, but he can also ask whether his acts produce results and, therefore, whether they have any meaning.

In this section the Preacher deals with the latter question. He inquires after wisdom in all that is done under heaven (vs. 13). He sets up this investigation on as wide and deep a basis as possible: he not only inquires after wisdom and knowledge, but also after madness and folly (vs. 17). He opens himself to the whole of reality in all of its aspects.

He doesn't inquire into the wisdom and folly by which humans act. That's another, very different matter. There's a great deal that could be said on that subject too. But then he'd be placing himself outside of and over against the human community of mankind. Inevitably a satirical and ironic tone would creep in. For there is much that is ridiculous in humans – in the way they present themselves and in the way they behave.

But if he made this his topic, he would be setting himself above his fellow-humans. Then he'd act as if he knew better and could do better. In practice, such a person is usually a big disappointment. All those who become known as critics of their time usually don't do all that much better themselves. This is why we should be wary of critical spirits. Usually they are no more than windy bores, including the so-called progressives among them.

Better to take a positive stance in life than a critical one! It is more human and, in any case, more in accordance with the nature of love as taught by the Gospel.

However, in this section the Preacher is not inquiring into the wisdom and folly of human action. He is launching an investigation into action itself. Is there wisdom in it? That is to say, is action itself meaningful, does it bring anything about, does it yield anything, does it produce any lasting results?

This search is a grievous task, he says, which God has given to the sons of men, with which they are to be burdened or exercised (vs. 13). Not only are man's acts in themselves a chasing after wind (vs. 14); the same must be said of the search for objective wisdom, the search for the meaning and significance of these acts – this



Plato and Aristotle by Raphael

too is a chasing after wind (vs. 17), for such a meaning cannot be unambiguously discovered and established, no matter how thorough his search.

The Preacher presents himself as king of Jerusalem. He says: I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge (vs. 16). And yet (he means to say) I have not been able to discover the meaning of man's labors. This too is vanity. This too is chasing after wind.

You can try to contain the wind or to grasp it, but the one is as impossible as the other. The wind is too swift, always beyond your grasp, constantly eluding you. So too is the search for objective wisdom in the deeds and destinies of men.

The Preacher doesn't say, however, that they contain no objective wisdom, no mean-

ing. He merely says that man cannot find it, not even with the utmost exertion of all his capacities for knowledge. To conclude the one from the other is always highly presumptuous. If I, a human being, can discover no meaning in things, does this then mean that we may say with certainty that they therefore contain no meaning?

Couldn't God perhaps have a deeper knowledge and a deeper insight into things than I? Is he not greater than our hearts? Perhaps the meaning of life is not just hidden from us, but it is too great and too grand for us. That's a wonderful thought: existence possesses a meaning so sublime that we cannot comprehend it, and that is why it is hidden from us.

However, this is not what the Preacher is saying. He only says that we cannot discover the meaning of our actions, which is very serious; it causes much suffering.

It is strange that the Preacher doesn't so

much discuss the fact that we cannot discover the meaning of existence in terms of its suffering; he limits himself to the idea that existence in terms of action appears meaningless to us. Usually we only begin to complain when suffering in its many horrible forms enters the picture. We cannot discover any meaning in these things. As long as we are healthy, active, engaged, and busy in the world, the question of meaninglessness doesn't come up. Secretly we think that we ourselves give meaning to things by our own actions. This too is an ego trip from which we must be converted.

The Preacher, however, probes much deeper: he admits that his search for the meaning of human action has been in vain. However, he also admits that this search is a burden which God has given to men (vs. 13). We must not only be engaged in doing but also in inquiring after the concrete meaning of what we do. This is how God has created us. He has created us with a consciousness and a conscience. This duality is both a gift and a task from God.

Animals, apparently, are not troubled by this duality. They just live. They don't ask about the meaning of life. Moreover, they don't act in the same way we do.

Although God has given this task to man, it is a heavy burden (sore travail), says the Preacher (vs. 13). Man is afflicted by it. It brings grief and sorrow. This is not meant as a universal and complete condemnation of wisdom itself. On the contrary. Often the Preacher values wisdom above foolishness. But, he says, remem-

ber that this blessing from God, the blessing of knowledge also weighs on life as a burden. It goes hand in hand with grief and sorrow – especially when it inquires into the meaning of human action.

To discover and to declare that this meaning is not to be found is an important part of knowledge and wisdom. It is certainly also a very painful part. It brings with it not only disappointment, but also disquiet, fear, and perplexity. Life is so grand that it is also rugged and raw.

But we must accept this ruggedness and rawness, this fear and perplexity, this sorrow and pain. These are realities. Seen aright, they are also valuable. We must not only accept them, but say "amen" to them.

To know that we do not know life's meaning is an affliction, but a noble affliction. Or, at least, it can become noble when it becomes part of a God-fearing manner of being and thinking.

Review/Stewardship

Novel by Calvin prof wins Newbery Honor Award



Phil De Haan

A book for young adults by Calvin College professor of English Gary Schmidt has been named one of the top books of 2004 by the American Library Association, winning two prestigious awards.

Schmidt's *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (published by Clarion Books) was named both a 2005 John Newbery Honor Book and a 2005 Michael L. Printz Honor Book.

Kira-Kira, by Cynthia Kadohata, won the 2005 Newbery Medal — named for 18th-century British bookseller John Newbery and awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children (a division of the American Library Association) to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy was one of just three books named as winners of the 2005 Newbery Honor Award. These are books, says the ALA, that are also truly distinguished.

Schmidt's book also was named a 2005 Michael L. Printz Honor Book, one of three so selected. The newer Printz award, established in 1999, recognizes excellence in literature written for young adults. The 2005 winner is "how i live now" by Meg Rosoff.

Susan Faust, chair of the Newbery Award committee, said Schmidt's book is superb.

"Steeped in imagery and laced with surprising humor, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* explores powerlessness, possibil-

ity and the profound impact individuals can make," she said. "We spent a year studying the universe of eligible books, and it is a thrill to name this as one of our honor books. We feel honored."

Schmidt, whose book was the only one to make both lists, was humbled by the attention.

"It's a tremendous honor," he said, "in a year when the books are strong and wonderful."

Remarkably, Schmidt was on hand to hear the awards announced at 8:15 a.m. eastern time at the American Library Association's midwinter meeting at Boston's Hynes Convention Center.

That's because Schmidt was in Massachusetts for the month of January with a group of Calvin students on the college's annual New England Saints interim, a three-week-long January class that focuses on American literature. In fact, he celebrated with his students after dealing with a few of the details that surround being named a Newbery winner, details like dealing with numerous reporters and publishers.

Reached by phone at the convention center, Schmidt said his immediate plan, after completing several interviews, was to change into some comfortable clothes and hang out with his students. But he did take the time to reflect on his book and the honors it received today.

"This one (book) is very close to my heart," he said simply. "It took three years to write — longer than I've ever spent on a creative book."

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy is based on an actual historical event — the eradication of a small African American community.

It is also the story of a friendship between two teenagers: Lizzie Bright Griffin, an African American girl from Malaga — an island adjacent to the town of Phippsburg, Maine — and Turner Buckminster, the son of Phippsburg's new minister.

"She loves the island, loves the lifestyle," Schmidt said. "He is a preacher's kid with all that brings."

In 1912, the town of Phippsburg evicted the mostly African American community from Malaga, placing many of the residents

The Importance of Wills
(Part One)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. [Ecclesiastes 9: 10,11]

We don't often look to the scriptures for advice on tangible topics like Financial Planning or Estate Planning. However, the words of Ecclesiastes speak very clearly on the issue of planning, don't they? All our planning must be done while we live because once we're in the grave, it can no longer be done.

This applies perfectly to the plans that will be carried out on our behalf once we are no longer here. Our first priority is to be sure of what will happen to us at death — are we assured of our salvation and eternity in heaven? But secondly, we must plan for what will happen to our earthly possessions, those blessings God has entrusted to our care. Does it matter to you what will happen to your things, your money? Do you care who will make the decisions related to that?

God is pleased with good planning, and he actually wants us to carefully care for everything he's given to us ... because it's all his to begin with. Certainly that extends to the planning we must do for a time when we cannot speak for ourselves because we've gone on to a better place. The scripture says in Proverbs 21:51 "Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run; hurry and scurry puts you further behind."

It's a fact that 50 percent of Canadians have not done any such planning, and it's also true that many who have, did it so long ago that their planning is no longer relevant to their lives. When is the last time you looked at your Will, if you have one? Are you okay with the provincial courts making all the decisions about what will happen to your possessions once you're gone? That's what happens if you don't have a will.

We live in a country where careful Estate Planning can benefit not only our families, but also God's ministries that are close to our hearts. It's therefore our duty to become informed of the opportunities and to make wise plans.

Stewardly tip:

Here are some questions we should all ask ourselves if we are

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick DeGraaf

contemplating a new Will or reviewing an old one:

- Is the person I chose to be my executor still someone capable and trustworthy? What about the person who would stand in for my first choice?
- Have I planned for adequate provision for minor children and their education, Christian or otherwise?
- Are the guardians chosen to care for my minor children people I would trust with their upbringing today? Do they share the same values and beliefs?
- Is my faith reflected in the choices I've made about the distribution of my assets or have I simply followed the easiest path of dividing things equally between my children?
- Have I included the various ministries that I supported through my lifetime with special gifts at my death?
- Is there a careful balance between what will go to the government, what will go to my family and what will support charity? Am I satisfied with this planning?
- Do I need help in getting my planning completed? Christian Stewardship Services can assist.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

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in a mental hospital, razing the island's homes and digging up the graveyard. The eviction was a beautification measure for the town, which planned to lure in more tourists with the construction of hotels. Turner's relationship with Lizzie leads him to a relationship with Malaga.

Schmidt said the book echoes a unifying theme in all his writing. "It's what I always write about,"

he said, "what it is that makes a child move from childhood to adulthood. It's when a child starts to say, 'This is my decision. I make this call.' It's the message a child has to get — that there's a moment when you have to become your own person."

Schmidt credits his wife, Anne, with unearthing the Malaga story in a guidebook while on the family's annual vacation in Maine — her birthplace. It's another reason the book

— and the awards — resonate so strongly with him.

The honors for Schmidt continue Calvin's tradition of excellence in children's literature. Meindert De Jong, who graduated the college in 1928, won the Newbery Medal in 1955 and the Hans Christian Andersen Medal in 1962.

"It is sort of unusual for a college our size to have two Newberys," Schmidt said.

Mission

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Building begins



Arlene van Hove

"The rock in the water does not know the pain of the rock in the sun."

After two years of planning and less than two weeks before the mission team was to leave for Haiti, the Canadian travel advisory dated December 27, 2004, bluntly warned Canadians not to travel to Haiti unless they have critical and compelling business or family reasons. They further stressed that criminal activity, police reprisals, and lawlessness remained persistent throughout the country and that there had been abductions and murders of business people and others, including aid workers.

This was not exactly comforting for some mission team members to read since we planned to leave on January 7th, 2005. Having lived in the Caribbean amongst political unrest in the early 1970's and having experienced a chilling close call, I questioned the wisdom of our decision. To put our minds at rest, the team leader asked for more details on the political and social stability of the country from the local co-ordinator of our project. He sent back a helpful and detailed explanation of the five levels of security by which they evaluate their own safety, especially now that the U.N. is visible in the country. And so, without further ado and much excitement, we decided to go as planned.

Tagging along with Trinity CRC

The project to Haiti began two years ago when Trinity CRC of Abbotsford, B.C. celebrated their 25th anniversary. At that time they decided to celebrate their blessings by looking outward and raise money for a service project in another country. Eventually, they chose to help the Haitian CRC in Port-au-Prince with the construction of their ministry training centre. The property had been bought, and when the church heard

A celebrating church looks outward: finding meaning in 'brick and mortar'

bution to the project in regards to time, energy and resources is much appreciated, another important reason for coming to Haiti was to be a visible, tangible expression of God's love for the Haitian people. In other words, working together on this building project would be a "means" to connect with each other in an empowering way.

Furthermore, Dan Vanden Hoek, the co-ordinator of our team and a staff member of the Haiti ministry team of *Sous Espwa*, challenged us "as missionaries to become the mission field." He suggested we ask ourselves what God could be trying to teach us while we were working on the project with the Haitian people.

During our time in Haiti, I took regular "quiet time" to think about my three questions: what else motivated me to come to Haiti, how could I be mutually empowering of others on the job and what could God be

trying to teach me while I am here.

At home in Port-au-Prince

For two solid weeks our team of 11 occupied the whole bottom floor of Dan and Pat Vanden Hoek's family home, which was surrounded by a typical high Haitian wall and gate.

At night we felt "snug as a bug" as we heard various sounds of family life in the neighborhood. The chatting of grown-ups in the streets, the crying and laughing of children, and the often loud Caribbean music that spilled out of open louvered windows. Two of our team members slept on the roof in the cool night air throughout our stay. While we heard nightly gun shots in the distance we felt safe and secure especially in the wake of the persistent barking of the Vanden Hoek's Doberman and Rottweiler!

In the morning, when the sun's rays peered over the horizon, we woke to the unrelenting sound of crowing roosters. Soon a steady and distant hum filled the morning air letting us know the people of Port-au-Prince were beginning to stir. After an often quiet breakfast and some inspirational singing, we gathered up our work gloves, water bottles, protective sun lotion and tools and left for work.

No words can adequately describe the entertaining aspect of our trip to the building site every morning. With a population of two million, the streets of Port-au-Prince were teeming with people and moving vehicles coming at us from any possible direction. Yet, our drivers neatly manoeuvred their rugged four-wheel drive vehicles into the line of steady moving traffic. And so, bumper-to-bumper we crept along carefully watching the moving traffic around us. The city's taxis were often brightly painted



Chain line

they would be receiving help from Trinity CRC, they put in the foundation and drilled a well on the site for the water needed during the construction. When my spouse and I heard of this potential project, we expressed interest in tagging along (we belong to Fleetwood CRC). The team was made up of eleven people.

The goals behind the "brick and mortar"

One of the goals of the mission team was to help the Haitians construct a specific building. It was also my reason for going. I am goal oriented and often prefer action over words. Yet, I intuitively knew there was more to my coming to Haiti. I decided to reflect on what else could have brought me to be part of this project while I was there.

At the same time, Jim Vriend, our team leader, reminded us that, while our contri-



Building progress

Mission



Hastro, the boss; Jim, the team leader; Dan, Sous Espwa coordinator, and his son, Tony

trucks that bore the name of God, Jesus or Mary somewhere on the vehicle. We all agreed the wording was appropriate since they were so stuffed to capacity the last passengers had to hang on for dear life!

Here and there our drivers would whip into rugged side streets lined with rubble and rock over which pigs, goats, chickens and dogs roamed looking for food. Groups of students often in simple uniforms added youthful vitality to the morning scene as they made their way to school. Sometimes we saw family members still eating their meal chatting casually with passers-by.

But the most unique sights were the brightly dressed Haitian women gracefully side-stepping the street clutter carrying large baskets of fruits, vegetables, baked goods or other kinds of saleable products on their heads as they were winding their way to their usual places-of-sale on the street. At the same time, we knew their lives were often harsh and full of challenges.

One block at a time...

And so, every morning when the gates of the building site swung open, I felt happy to be part of this mission trip. Several Haitians would already be waiting for us when we arrived. Some of them had guarded the building site throughout the night.

I learned much as I helped the local people construct their building. I learned how to use a trowel. I learned to judge whether the mortar was too dry or too wet. I learned the corners had to be done first and experts would do that. I learned the value of using a level. I learned to chip away at a brick if it did not fit the first time. I learned to consistently wear my work gloves or put up with blisters!

I felt fortunate I was able to get to know the Haitian people on the

job site in a very natural way. They think nothing of toiling in the hot sun wearing a long sleeved jersey. They joke and laugh easily while sweat is pouring down their faces. They feel blessed when they have a few days work. They know what they are doing and they know what they want. The women smile a lot as they made our daily lunch onsite for the entire crew! The young fellows love to play soccer during lunch hour in spite of the mid-day

heat. They have tricks up their sleeves and love nothing better than to see us fumble with the buckets they send speedily down the chain line. They have good days and bad days. In other words, we are all God's creatures and we are more similar than we are different.

I enjoyed watching the building progress day after day. I felt proud when the outside walls went up. I felt prouder still when the inside walls went up. And I felt pure joy when we communally passed buckets up and down the line to pour the cement floor in a spirit of fun and laughter.

An all inclusive mission trip?

And that was not all there was to our mission trip. On the first Sunday after we arrived, we worshiped at the CRC in Port-au-Prince. In the evenings, throughout the two weeks, we had several staff members of *Sous Espwa* (which aptly means "source of hope") speak to us about various aspects of Haiti and their work with the Haitian people. Lesly Jules spoke to us on the history of Haiti and his work with Haitian Partners for Christian Development. Ad de Blaeeij discussed the struggles of the Haitian people and took us to various historical points in Port-au-Prince. Leanne Geisterer gave us insight into the complexities of poverty. Dan Vanden Hoek squeezed in a trip to an orphanage that had a profound affect on all of us. Howard Van Dam saw to it that

we were able to experience an amazing drum and dance performance by a talented group of boys and young men who were previous Haitian street kids. The program also included an incredible dance number by a young man who had cerebral palsy. The day before we left we visited the offices of the CRC of Port-au-Prince.

On the weekend, Dan and Pat Vanden Hoek traveled with us through the country to Jacmel, a southern town 3.5 hours from Port-au-Prince. We stayed at a local hotel and were able to go swimming in the Caribbean Sea. We also visited the market to buy some souvenirs.

On Sunday morning we piled into the bus to worship at the CRC in Jacmel. Somehow we missed the church building because the pastor, seated on the back of a speeding motorcycle, flagged down our bus and suggested we might have missed a turn in the road? It seems he saw the bus roar by while he was outside chatting with the Sunday school teacher. So, he jumped on the nearest transportation available to help us out.

Stirred my heart

Looking back, the mission trip was about constructing a building, connecting with the Haitian people and gaining insight into the work of *Sous Espwa*. Each member of the team had his or her own personal reason for going and consequently will be enriched according to those reasons.

For myself, in terms of the three questions I reflected upon, I realized I chose to go on this mission trip because I am grateful for my life and I wanted to give to those who are struggling. I also wanted to experience a hands-on project in a developing country that is measureable and forward moving. At the same time, I wanted to learn first hand about missions in the field such as *Sous Espwa*.

In terms of empowering others on the job site, I often wondered on how many of us actually interact in this way with our own family, friends and others back home. I also wondered whether we are even aware of the subtle intricacies of an empowering relationship. Yet, the word *respect* sums up the way we need to relate to all peoples of all cultures. I think our presence in Haiti, our friendliness, and our ability to listen without jumping to conclusion, as well as our effort at learning their language and understanding their cultural background helped them feel respected. At the same time, they readily reciprocated this respect allowing for mutual empowerment.

In terms of what God could be trying to teach me in Haiti - I was again brought back to the simple reality that God cares for his people. He shows this care

through our service of others. This service has to be tangible and forward moving in regards to the reality of people's every day lives that will allow them to have a basic standard of living in regards to all aspects of their spiritual, emotional and physical health. This means those who have more, need to work along side those who are struggling in areas of health, education, work skills and development of natural resources. The need is great and it stirred my heart. Let us hope the workers are many.

As for Trinity CRC and each team member we need to ask - where do we go from here? There are three more construction projects waiting in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. What about encouraging other churches to celebrate their blessings by taking on similar challenges? I believe it was Nelson Mandela who recently likened poverty to apartheid and said, "The world is hungry for action, not words."

Arlene Van Hove is now on sabbatical from Cascade Christian Counselling Association in Surrey, B.C.



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Saying Goodbye

Opinion

Mainly on Money

I left the Netherlands for Ontario at the tender age of 22 upon completion of my formal education. Started my Canadian career as a farmhand for \$50 per month plus room and board, moved after 8 weeks from Strathroy to Grimsby, where I landed a job in a flour and feed mill earning the capital sum of \$29.00 in a 58 hour week.

Within a year of arrival started to work for a finance company, chasing delinquents. Learned a lot in a short time, including that I didn't want to have a career based on human misery, so I became an insurance agent in St Catharines, soon branching out into general insurance, and later real estate.

Then a radical switch: 30 years ago sold everything – house, business – and moved to Tweed. Took off a year to build an energy-efficient house, did some teaching, went back to University to qualify for Commercial Real Estate Appraiser and found my niche: writing narrative appraisals.

Basically I am a man of two worlds: Europe and North America. The country I left in 1951 has changed dramatically, is now part of the United States of Europe, which itself is well on the way to become the new super power, rivaling the United States of America.

That these two continents are different is no secret. How different? Let me outline a few dissimilarities: Europe is secular, America religious. Europeans treasure free time: most have 4 weeks or more of paid holidays and enjoy them. Americans stay home and work. A typical American worker put in 1,877 hours in 2000, and, based on a 40 hour work week, works 8 weeks more than the 1,562 hours clocked in by his or her French counterpart.

Americans consider Europe stagnant, socialist, atheist and inflexible; Europeans maintain that America is in trouble, that its pursuit of wealth, size and abundance is ecologically devastating, and built on debt.

There is truth in both statements. According to the economist Andre Gunder Frank, "All Uncle Sam's debt, including private household consumer credit-card, mortgage etc. debt of about \$10 trillion, plus corporate and financial, with options, derivatives and the like, and state and local government debt comes to an unvisualizable, indeed unimaginable, \$37 trillion, which is nearly four times Uncle Sam's GDP [gross domestic product]." That works out to \$125,000 for every person, from newborn babe to billionaire Bill Gates.

Other contrasts: Europe as a whole has 87 prisoners per 100,000 people. America has 685. While Europe has universal health care, in the USA 45 million have no health insurance at all. Is that why the crime rate is almost 8 times higher there? Also getting sick is highly costly: a couple of years ago my wife spent 24 hours in a hospital: the bill \$12,000 (Can).

Not surprisingly, according to the World Health Organization, the United States is

Europeans more Christian than Americans; American debtors

number one in health spending per capita – 15 percent of its GDP – and thirty-seventh in quality of service. Sweden, by contrast, devotes just 8 percent, with better results. Consequently Americans live shorter than West Europeans. Even though Americans are more religious – I mean more people go to church – the Europeans are much more generous, donating \$36.5 billion in development aid in 2003, three times as much as the US, of which the major part goes to Israel as military aid.

By now it's well-known that the US has just 5 percent of the world's population (and falling), but is responsible for 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gas output – and growing. In direct personal contribution to global warming, each American man, woman and child pumps twenty metric tons of carbon dioxide into the air but just nine tons for every European, while standards of living are similar. And while the American pollution share keeps on increasing and Bush keeps on blocking any international action on improving air quality or global warming, Europeans are actively busy reducing their share. Writes Oxford historian Timothy Garton Ash: "the real weapons of mass destruction are global poverty and incipient environmental catastrophe.... It was said of ancient Rome that the emperor Nero fiddled while the city burned. In the new Rome, the president fiddles while the Earth burns."

And where do we in Canada come in? Not bad, considering that we are the highest per capita energy users in the world. We have approved Kyoto and are making valiant efforts to reduce our dependency on finite energy resources. In a recent ranking of 146 countries with the highest level of environmental protection, European countries occupied the first 5 places, with Canada coming in Number 6, while the USA came in 46.

I am glad to conclude that in many ways Canada is more like Europe: we have the best of both worlds. In spite of our close proximity to the USA, in spirit and action we are moving away from the destructive habits of our southerly neighbor.

Could religion has something to do with it? Writes Reggie McNeal, in his book *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*: "We have a church in North America that is more secular than the culture." I agree. Through their actions secular Europe is more Christian than pious America. On this continent the Devil has successfully convinced the instituted church that its members go to heaven, leaving church people free to neglect the earth, where, they believe, the ungodly will be "Left Behind."

This earth is all we've got and we try to preserve it for ourselves, our children and grandchildren. There, I think, lies the greatest difference. All this religious talk reminds me of the Lord's prayer and the line: "Forgive us our debts." A little detour first.

We all know Bill Gates as the wealthiest

man in the world. He is selling the U.S. dollar short. So is Warren Buffet, number 2 on the list of the real rich.

What does it mean "selling short?" It means that you buy dollars a year or so from now for say 10% less than the current price, and hope that your gamble pays off big. The weakness of the US dollar is the reason why.

A few weeks ago Greg Ip of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote a front-page piece on the beleaguered U.S. economy, "As Dollar Weakens, Hidden Strength May Stave Off Crisis." It cited a "growing chorus" of experts warning "that the U.S.'s gaping budget and trade deficits will lead to a crisis in which the dollar falls much more sharply, driving up interest rates and squeezing the economy."

So selling short is the thing people with lots of money do. George Soros, another rich man, once made a \$1 billion selling the British Pound short. No wonder the rich get richer.

Is the United States at the edge of the sort of currency collapse followed by deep recession that has in recent years hit lesser powers from Mexico and Argentina to Thailand? Barry Eichengreen, an economic historian at the University of California, Berkeley, has pointed out ominously that "there is no historical precedent for such a large economy being so heavily in debt to the rest of the world."

I know, I have written on this before. People call me a pessimist because I point out the glaring weaknesses of our economic system. Would you call a doctor a pessimist if he says that you have cancer? Well, our economy has the equivalent of such a disease which will be mortal if no counter measures are taken. Debt is deadly. It's a many-sided evil. Our generation's debt is more than just money owed. Debt affects all facets of life: when we neglect our bodies, when we don't exercise or eat properly, our bodies suffer a health-debt. Kyoto is all about the debt we owe the cosmos, the stuff we have taken out of the air, soil, water and not repaid. Debt also means the capital we owe to non-renewable resources: oil comes to mind, stubbornly sticking to the \$50.00 per barrel range, a sign of growing scarcity. Lack of love toward our children, spouses, neighbors is a debt as well.

"Forgive us our debts" includes all of the above. Debts always comes back to haunt us. If we can't pay then we are forced into bankruptcy. If society can't pay back the debt owed to restore equilibrium in the climate and so balance its natural budgets, then forced liquidation is the only way: a breakdown of our natural system, which comes at a very high price, also in human lives.

Perhaps the price is 'Collapse,' the title of a book I bought last week. In *Collapse* Jared Diamond ponders the Fate of the Earth. Its subtitle is, "How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed." He writes that, "Our

world society is presently in a non-sustainable course." Eating up its capital, in other words.

After outlining 12 instances of non-sustainability: habitat destruction, over fishing, loss of species, land erosion, fossil fuel depletion, fresh water problems, solar energy conversion, chemical pollution, alien species invasions, global warming, population growth, world-wide prosperity, he continues: "They are like time bombs with fuses of less than 50 years.... If we solved 11 of these problems, but not the 12th, we would still be in trouble.... We have to solve them all."

And you call me a pessimist? Professor Dr. Diamond doesn't mention American financial debt, in my opinion a problem that needs to be solved in 5 not 50 years. In the short run, debt creates economic activity. In the long run debt becomes a real burden. Of its \$37 trillion debt, America owes much of this to China, Japan, and other major foreign governments. Were a severe earthquake to hit Japan, or a banking crisis to develop in China (which has its own "bubble" worries), Beijing or Tokyo might well feel it had no choice but to begin selling off parts of its U.S. bond holdings in order to use the capital at home to stabilize its financial system – at the expense of the Golden Calf: the American consumer.

Not only is Bill Gates selling dollars short: China too is having second thoughts about the U.S. currency. Last year, in spite of its reserves growing by \$112 billion, the American money portion of that was only 25% or \$28 billion, according to the always well-informed Montreal-based financial consultancy, Bank Credit Analyst.

What sort of advice should I give you? Get your house in order. Pay off your debts. Live within your budgetary as well as ecological means.

Past columns can be viewed at hielema.ca. Comments are welcome.

[Note: I know it's great sport to knock the Americans, but let's strive for a modicum of fairness. Americans far outdo most of their European counterparts in charitable giving, that is, in giving as individuals (about 75 percent donate compared to less than 45 percent in Europe and they give more of their income). About one-third of donations made to humanitarian aid globally every year comes from the U.S.]

It is true that the amount devoted to foreign aid by the U.S. government is the lowest among developed countries not in absolute terms but in terms of the percentage of gross national product. Americans have concluded (rightly in their own case) that development aid is better given through non-governmental agencies. Egypt and Jordan together get almost as much aid as Israel because in the US aid is usually a tool of foreign policy.]

Editor



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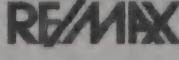
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Where there is discord,

harmony.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness,

light.

Where there is sorrow, joy.

Oh Divine Master, grant that
I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;

to be understood as
to understand;

to be loved as to love;

for it is in giving

that we receive;

it is in pardoning;

that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC.

In case of free listing, space limitations apply.

The charge otherwise is \$7.50 per line, or \$1.50 per 1/3 line, per insertion

Mar 5 Mission Emphasis Day, Covenant Christian Church, Wyoming, Ontario. Speaker: DR. MIKE GOHEEN from Redeemer College Theme: The Great Commission Tel. 1-519-899-2384 or 1-519-845-1613 e-mail: jazekveld@rivernet.net

Mar 5 "Growing in God's Grace". Celebrating 40 years of Christian Education at London District Christian Secondary School. Celebration - Fund Raising Dinner @ 6:30pm @ LDCSS. For more information contact Christine Renkema @ alstein@execulink.com.

Mar 7 Pastors and others with an interest are invited to attend Redeemer University College's annual **Ministers' Conference**. This year, we will be welcoming Dr. Craig Bartholomew, the H. Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy and Professor of Religion and Theology at Redeemer. Dr. Bartholomew, who is also an ordained Anglican priest, will be speaking on the theme **Prayer and the Pastor - Examining Prayer in the Gospel of Luke**. The registration cost is \$25 per person (includes lunch) and can be paid the day of the conference. Please register with Magda Beukes in the President's Office at 877-779-0913, locally at 905-648-2131 ext. 4208, or at mbeukes@redeemer.on.ca by February 28. Registration is at 9:30 am, opening devotions are at 10 am and the day ends at about 3 p.m..

Mar 18, 19 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "DE RUIGE RITSELAARS" Een Klucht in 4 bedrijven door Hub Fober. Woodstock, Market Centre Theatre: Friday at 8pm & Saturday at 2pm and 8pm. See ad.

Mar 20 3:00 pm: Jonathan Oldengarm performs in the Distinguished Organists in Recital series at First United Church, King and William Streets, Waterloo, Ontario. The series celebrates the relocation and refurbishment of the 1971 Gabriel Kney organ formerly located in London's Aeolian Hall. ADMISSION: \$20.00. For tickets, call the church office at 519-745-8487, or 578-4006 after 5 p.m.

Apr 8 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "DE RUIGE RITSELAARS", Een Klucht in 4 bedrijven door Hub Fober, at the Christian Heritage School, Jordan at 8pm. See ad for ticket information.

Apr 9 Concert of Sacred Music by St. Thomas Crescendo Male Choir 7:30 p.m. Bethel CRC, 716 Classic Drive, London (Freewill offering) Info: (519) 637-4357

May 1 Concert of Sacred Music by St. Thomas Crescendo Male Choir 7:30 p.m. Knox Presbyterian Church, 55 Hincks Street, St. Thomas (Freewill offering) Info: (519) 637-4357

May 7 Liberation Choir 60th Anniversary Concert, with the Guelph Symphony Orchestra, 7:30 at Hamilton Place. Tickets: \$20, \$30, \$40. Available from choir members/ box office/ www.organs.ca

July 1-3 Nobleford CRC 100 year anniversary celebrations with picnic, banquet and services. For more information contact Bert/Pat Konynenbelt at (403)824-3442 or by e-mail at bpkbelt@telus.net



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News

Christians in India provide help for tsunami victims



Temporary Shelters

Sonya Vanderveen-Feddeema

Davina Boerefyn's first thought when she heard about the tsunami that decimated South Asia on Dec. 26 was for the safety of her family in Madras (Chennai), the capital of the Indian state Tamil Nadu on the coastal side of the Bay of Bengal. A resident of Grimsby, Ontario since September 2004 when she moved there from India after marrying Canadian Tim Boerefyn, Davina, 27, recalls the fear that gripped her as she phoned her family, not sure whether they were dead or alive.

"My heart was beating so fast when I dialed my parents' number. They were all safe and unaffected by the tsunami!"

But despite her relief, Davina watched, horrified, in the next days as TV images made plain the extent of the tsunami's devastation and how it had destroyed the coastal region of Madras, a city of 8 million people.

"It was horrific to watch! It seemed unreal, something that you watch in a movie and that never happens in real life. When I saw faces that were familiar because they lived in the same place that I have lived, it was very difficult and sad. Seeing them crying and mourning for their loved ones wasn't easy to watch."

Davina's father, Benjamin Unmaiudayan, is actively involved in bringing relief

to the area. He is a pastor and the CEO of Inter-Mission which works with several other Christian missions – Hindustan Bible Institute, Apostolic Christian Assembly, Assembly of India Christians, Moriah Orphanages, Gospel Echoing Missions, and Prison Fellowship, to name a few.

In a predominately Hindu society, Inter-Mission helps people irrespective of their religion or ethnicity.

"Inter-Mission is very interested in sharing the love of Jesus with the orphaned," Davina says. "They are eager to take in people from all kinds of religions so that they can show them the love of God, and the way to the one true God."

Inter-Mission owns and supervises approximately 85 orphanages responsible for 3000 children, some of whom have lost both parents and others only one parent. Individual sponsors – who pay about 50\$ (CAN) a month –

support the children. The children attend local government schools. The mission also operates day care centers which care for over 20,000 children, providing breakfasts and lunches, as well as education.

Recently Mr. Unmaiudayan, along with some of his Russian and German sponsors, visited five relief shelters on the Andamans and Nicobar Islands, located in the Bay of Bengal. They distributed relief



materials – clothes, bed sheets, stoves and cooking vessels – to approximately 1000 people. They also arranged for children whose parents were dead or missing because of the disaster to be taken into the existing orphanages.

The organization is also exploring ways to assist adults who have lost their livelihood. Plans are under way to create job opportunities, and to assist fishermen in obtaining motorized fishing boats and fishing nets, both expensive commodities. Medical aid is being provided, as is vocational training for young people.

Davina's Christian faith has helped her cope with the emotional impact of the catastrophe. "The tsunami tragedy seems unbelievable," she says. "The magnitude of what one wave did in a matter of 5 to 10 minutes is more than I could have imagined. I have heard from my parents about how it has affected villages in India, and it is very pathetic. But I believe in God and I know that he is in control of all things, however horrific the happenings are."



Checking the boats

She shares a story related by her father about several people who experienced God's protection. "On the morning the tsunami hit the coastal side of Madras, a group of people had gathered together on the beach at a campsite and had been praying. For some reason the leader of the group felt they had to head back to the camp. A few minutes later the tsunami hit the coast."

I did in India. I had no qualms about being a Christian in India and never felt threatened to openly confess to being one."

But Davina – who attended both Christian elementary and high schools, as well as a Christian college – points out that it isn't easy to live in the midst of Hindu culture because of what adherents do to ensure their salvation.

"I have seen some of the gruesome and barbaric things the Hindus do to make themselves 'clean' and win favor with the gods," she says. "It is truly sad and heart-breaking to see them so blinded to the truth. They need us Christians to show them that God loves them and has already done what we need to reach God, and that we don't have to punish ourselves to become 'holy'."

Davina is convinced that growing up as a Christian in a Hindu culture has strengthened her faith and taught her to never take for granted what God has done for her through Jesus Christ.

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